

# CLOSE-UP

## ON EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY



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### INTRODUCTION

Over the last quarter century, a series of education reforms have come and gone leaving little impact on student achievement. These reforms were ignored, poorly implemented, challenged in court, repealed or simply watered down until they were ineffective.

In 1999 with the release of School Performance Scores (SPS) for Louisiana's K-8 schools, the state embarked on a major, long-term effort to improve schools and raise student performance by implementing a comprehensive new accountability system. Elements of the complex new system will be phased in over the next decade.

PAR has undertaken a multi-year project to closely monitor the state's implementation of Louisiana's School and District Accountability System. In addition, PAR will be monitoring its implementation and impact on the Orleans Parish School System.

The monitoring efforts include following similar developments in other states; attending meetings of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and its accountability-related subcommittees; tracking proposed policy changes, legislation and legal challenges; collecting related media accounts; and evaluating accountability reports, test results and other available documentation. The primary purpose of this project is to assure that the accountability reform effort is not compromised or weakened before it has had an opportunity to bear fruit.

This report examines the potential impact of federal legislation being implemented as a part of President Bush's education reform initiative on Louisiana's accountability program. It also examines changes to the program since PAR's last report and other developments that may have an impact on program implementation or success. PAR's next report will focus on the recently released 2001 School Performance Scores, with special emphasis on the performance of Orleans Parish schools.

# Federal Government Adopts Accountability Program

On January 8, President Bush signed a new federal education law, in effect, creating a nationwide education accountability program similar to reforms Louisiana is currently implementing. The complex 1,200 page law, which reauthorizes the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965*, places heavy new demands on states to set academic standards, test students, hire qualified teachers, sanction poor schools and achieve results. How these new demands will affect Louisiana's fledgling program cannot be fully known, however, until rules defining the many requirements are developed and published—a process that could take a year or more. The act also authorizes significant increases in federal funding and changes the way those funds are allocated.

Louisiana's accountability program will be altered, to some extent, by each of the following major requirements of the ESEA:

- Students in grades three through eight must be tested annually in mathematics and reading, using state-developed tests linked to state standards.
- Schools are to raise **all** students to a level of academic proficiency, as defined by their states, within 12 years.
- Within four years, all teachers in core academic subjects must be “highly qualified.”
- Schools that fail to make progress must offer public school choice or supplemental education services, such as private tutoring.
- Schools that fail to make adequate progress must face increasing sanctions with reconstitution after five years.
- Schools must close the gap in scores between rich and poor students and white and minority students.

## Impact of the ESEA on Louisiana's Accountability Program

Because Louisiana is already in its third year of implementing a strong education accountability program, it may have less difficulty than most other states in meeting many of the new ESEA requirements. In a recent *Education Week* evaluation of state education standards and accountability, Louisiana ranked fourth highest among all the states.

The new federal program and Louisiana's accountability program are quite similar. Both require annual testing to measure student performance, set incremental goals for schools to improve, sanction schools that do not improve sufficiently, and give failing schools additional help. Louisiana has already implemented many, but not all, of the federal provisions. Other areas may need modifications depending on the final rules adopted by the federal government.

Each of the following elements of the ESEA present Louisiana with potential problems.

### Student Testing

The ESEA requires states to implement a testing program to annually test students in third through eighth grades in mathematics and reading, using state-developed tests linked to state standards. It also requires students to be tested at some point in high school and to be tested in science at certain grade levels.

Louisiana is one of only 16 states in the nation that already administer English (reading) and mathematics tests to their third- through eighth-graders. However, Louisiana only uses a standards-based test (LEAP 21) in the fourth and eighth grades. The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, norm-referenced tests based on national norms, are used for the remaining grades.

If the state is forced to replace the Iowa Tests with new LEAP tests based on Louisiana standards, comparability with other states would be lost. The only remaining national comparison would then be the ESEA-required sample testing of third- and eighth-graders every two years.

Louisiana is one of several states hoping to avoid the cost of developing new tests to replace the Iowa or other similar tests. Louisiana has conducted an equating study to show how the Iowa Tests relate to its standards. This may satisfy the federal requirement. The only drawback is that the mixed system of tests will continue to provide a less-than-perfect measurement of student progress from year to year.

## Student Achievement Goal

The ESEA goal to have **all** students at the **state's** proficient level of academic achievement on the **state's** assessment tests within 12 years is quite ambitious. It is up to each state to define what is meant by proficient. Louisiana's LEAP test scores are labeled Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Approaching Basic and Unsatisfactory. Currently, students in the gatekeeper fourth and eighth grades need only score Approaching Basic to be promoted.

The goal of the state's accountability program was to have the **average** student score at the proficient level, not all students. Louisiana's K-8 schools have 18 years remaining on their 20-year state goals and high schools have 20 years left. The higher federal standard and the shortened, 12-year timetable create a significant problem for the state.

The gravity of the state's problem is demonstrated by the recent national test results. As shown in Table 1, only about one-fourth of the nation's students scored at or above the proficient level in mathematics in the sample tested in 2000. Louisiana students scored only about half as well. If the NAEP definition of "proficient" were to be used by the states, Louisiana would not be the only one struggling to meet the federal goal.

The state has several possible options. It could attempt to meet the goal by raising the growth targets for the schools. This might, of course, require more costly assistance to schools that cannot meet the higher targets and give more schools negative growth labels. Another approach would be to lower the cut-off score for "proficient." This may be allowable under the ESEA but would weaken the accountability program. A final option is simply to wait out the federal government. Many states have not yet even met the basic standards and testing requirements in the 1994 version of the ESEA, and most were able to obtain waivers to avoid losing federal funding.

**Table 1**  
**Percentage of Students at the Proficient Level or Above**  
**(2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress )**

|                    | <u>Fourth Grade</u> | <u>Eighth Grade</u> |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Reading</b>     |                     |                     |
| U.S.               | 32%                 | NA                  |
| Louisiana          | NA                  | NA                  |
| <b>Mathematics</b> |                     |                     |
| U.S.               | 26%                 | 27%                 |
| Louisiana          | 14%                 | 12%                 |
| <b>Science</b>     |                     |                     |
| U.S.               | 29%                 | 32%                 |
| Louisiana          | 19%                 | 18%                 |

## Qualified Teachers

The federal legislation requires that, in four years, all teachers in core academic subjects be “fully qualified” to teach those subjects. States are to develop a plan to attain this goal, and the federal government is providing some funding for teacher recruitment, professional development and retention.

Unfortunately, the legislation does not provide any definition for the term “fully qualified.” Usually, a qualified teacher is one who has met a state’s certification requirements. In theory, since there is no standardized method to certify teachers and the certification process varies from state to state, the level of “quality” will vary.

Nationwide, there is a shortage of certified teachers. This is especially true in Louisiana, where some school districts have as few as 50% of their teachers fully certified. Critics argue that the federal goal is impossible to meet due to this shortage. Supporters argue that states need to be more innovative in recruiting, training and retaining teachers and must be more willing to examine and change some of the ground rules and procedures that today determine who can teach and who cannot. Supporters call for alternative certification programs and reorienting systems for training, hiring, inducting and deploying teachers as ways to attract more quality teachers for the nation’s classrooms.

Louisiana is ahead of most states as it forges a partnership between higher education and elementary/secondary education groups in an effort to improve teacher quality. The state’s new Practitioner Teacher Program, which allows individuals holding non-education degrees to take a streamlined track to become certified teachers through a combination of course work and full-time teaching, is an example of an innovative program to bring more quality individuals into the classroom. Other cooperative programs are being developed to improve training for new teachers to increase their retention rate.

## School Choice or Tutoring

Under the new ESEA, a school that fails to make yearly adequate progress for two consecutive years must provide public school choice. The district must provide transportation for students who choose other district schools and must use up to 5% of its Title I funding to pay for this option.

Students in a school that fails to progress for three consecutive years must be offered public school choice or supplemental education services (e.g., private tutoring, after-school programs, etc.) as chosen by the student’s parents. The supplemental education services can be provided by public schools or by private groups, including commercial (e.g., Sylvan Learning Centers, etc.) and religious organizations. A school district must use up to 5% of its Title I funding to pay for supplemental education services, and it may use an additional 10% to pay for public school transportation costs or supplemental services.

The federal program makes public school choice available sooner than does Louisiana’s current program, and it provides funding for transportation. School districts that have received BESE waivers from the state requirement might find it more difficult to get a federal waiver. In addition, school districts may not be able to claim that a federal desegregation case prevents them from offering public school choice since federal law now requires it.

The major change is the requirement that local school districts will have to provide tutoring or other educational services to students in poorly performing schools, and use a portion of their Title I funding to pay for the services. School districts will have to set up programs to notify parents about the program and develop a payment process if parents select a private provider for the services. Also, the state may have to assume the new role of monitoring private and nonprofit tutoring companies.

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The new tutoring provision should benefit the state's accountability program by providing more resources to help increase performance and by placing more pressure on school districts to improve failing schools before this provision kicks in. One drawback is that demand could far outstrip the available funding.

## Reconstitution

The new federal law requires more drastic sanctions for schools that fail to make progress. After four consecutive years, the school district must make significant changes in the school's operations, such as replacing staff or curriculum. Failing to make adequate yearly progress for five consecutive years, the school would be reconstituted. This might involve reopening as a charter school or a state takeover of the school's operation.

Louisiana's accountability program calls for the reconstitution of schools in Corrective Action Level III, but it does not specify details. The local school district must submit a detailed reconstitution plan for the school. If BESE disapproves the plan, it can revoke state approval of the school and withhold state funding. The Louisiana plan never envisioned the direct takeover of a school by the state.

Louisiana's Constitution prohibits BESE from having any control over the business affairs, officers or employees of the local school boards. This eliminates many of the sanctions listed in the federal law. Perhaps the only real option the state has is to withhold funding from the district.

## Growth Targets For Disadvantaged Groups

Under the ESEA, schools must not only show regular progress in student achievement overall but also by traditionally disadvantaged groups as well. These include the poor, minorities and children who do not speak English at home.

Louisiana's accountability program does not set separate growth targets for demographic groups within schools. Thus, a school could make its growth target even though a small subgroup of students was losing ground. The new federal requirements would address this potential problem. Depending on how the rules are written, Louisiana may have to incorporate subgroup growth components in school targets. The district and school report cards will also have to include performance data by subgroup. This will more accurately point out deficiencies. Whether it might also lead to increased parental dissatisfaction remains to be seen.

## Changes in Federal Funding

If Congress appropriates the increased funding authorized in the new federal law, states can expect more money to help pay for their accountability programs. The largest pot of money is in the Title I authorization which grows from \$13.5 billion in fiscal year 2002 to \$25 billion in fiscal year 2007. In addition, a new funding formula in the legislation targets the federal Title I funding to the poorest schools. The bill also includes more money for rural schools and permission to roll their programs together in order to do things they could not do before.

The actual Title I appropriation for fiscal year 2002 was \$3 billion less than the authorization, but the law was not signed until three months into the fiscal year. In a period of economic distress and the challenge of dealing with terrorism, Congress will be sorely tested in attempting to meet the funding goals of the law.

The new ESEA requirements will be costly, particularly in developing new tests, providing interventions for failing schools, upgrading the cadre of teachers and providing supplemental help for students. Just how costly it will be will depend, in large part, on how the law is interpreted.

## Preliminary Evaluation

Nationally, the new federal law has been criticized by some as an intrusion by the federal government into an area of purely state and local responsibility. Some strongly object to the major focus on testing. Others point to existing unfunded mandates and suggest that the additional funding will fall short of meeting the cost of the new requirements. Yet others argue that the compromise law fell short of its reform promise by excluding far-reaching elements of the Bush proposal, such as private school vouchers and combining funding into block grants.

Nationwide, however, educators at the state level are reported, by such sources as *Education Week*, to be generally supportive of the new federal plan. Supporters point out that many states

have been dragging their feet on accountability and needed this federal shove to spur action.

The ESEA presents Louisiana with a number of challenges but far fewer and less significant than those faced by states which have not already entered the accountability era. The federal law is largely compatible with Louisiana's accountability program. It would make the state program stronger and more aggressive but its ambitious timetables may prove unrealistic.

In the worst case scenario, Louisiana might have to scrap parts of the existing accountability plan, develop some new tests, redefine scoring definitions, set new growth targets, exercise more sanctions and spend even more on supplemental services and teachers. If the federal rules provide enough flexibility, however, the transition could be relatively painless.

## Threats to Program Implementation

Besides the possible impact of federal legislation on the state's accountability program, several other potential threats may challenge its full implementation. These threats include legislative action, program funding, legal challenges and grassroots opposition. In addition, events that occur in other states as they implement their own accountability programs may have an impact on Louisiana's implementation.

### Legislative Action

The state's accountability program survived the 2001 legislative session intact without major changes and with strong financial support. Debate in the education area primarily centered on the teacher pay raise issue, with teachers receiving an across-the-board \$2,060 raise. Support workers ended up receiving a one-time

pay supplement of \$328 after several attempts to give them a pay raise failed. In addition, \$17.2 million was given to 55 school districts that were short-changed last fiscal year due to an error in the calculation of the FY 1999-2000 MFP.

Several bills would have weakened the accountability program if passed. As noted in Table 2, these bills mainly sought changes in the state's testing policy, such as removing the high stakes component of the LEAP 21 and GEE 21, changing the LEAP 21 testing dates, or excluding a group of students from taking the LEAP 21 exam. All bills were killed in committee, but during testimony on the proposed legislation, several Department of Education representatives were intensely questioned by several legislators, indicating legislative support for accountability is not universal.

Legislators adopted two resolutions that do not carry the effect of law. One urged BESE and

local school districts to reduce the class size in fourth- and eighth-grade classes to 20 students or less. The other urged BESE to drop the requirement that certain students with disabilities pass the graduation exit exam to receive a diploma.

Unless the governor includes it in a call for a special session, the accountability program is safe from legislative micro-management until 2003. This gives the program a period of stability in which to produce results. But with an election year in 2003, any perceived failure of the accountability program could make it an election issue and subject it to disruptive legislative action. The initial success of the state's K-8 schools in meeting their first-cycle growth targets and the higher-than-anticipated scores posted by the high schools suggest that such a disruption of the program is only a remote possibility.

## Funding

The accountability program received almost \$26 million in increased funding over the previous year to support several important aspects of the program. (See Table 3.) Most of that funding increase is appropriated for accountability program rewards. With the end of the first two-year cycle for K-8 schools, those that exceeded their growth target and had at least a 0.1 point growth for free lunch (not including reduced lunch) students were eligible for a monetary reward, and the Legislature appropriated \$10 million for this purpose. (See School Rewards later in this report.)

Some of the increased funding was needed to support the entry of high schools into the accountability program. A summer school program for students who have not passed the required portions of the graduation exit exam by the end of their junior year was funded with \$3 million. In addition, \$750,000 was appropriated for high school improvement grants to give resources to low-performing high schools to develop or implement improvement programs. The state is also expecting more than \$5 million in federal funding for low-performing schools. It is anticipated that a majority of this funding will go to the New Orleans public school system.

The Legislature also appropriated funds for several programs that will have an indirect positive effect on the accountability program. About \$32 million in unused federal welfare funding for the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program was diverted to give funding to several programs that will benefit the accountability program. The Legislature established a pre-kindergarten (pre-K) program for at-risk 4-year-olds and appropriated \$15 million of the TANF funds to support it. This program will provide early childhood development services for approximately 3,800 of an estimated 13,400 unserved at-risk 4-year-olds at an average funding level of \$5,000 per child. This program, if continued and expanded, should result in students better prepared for school.

Besides the pre-K program funding, the Legislature also directed that \$14 million in TANF funds be appropriated for the Pre-GED/Skills Option (now called Options Program) and other dropout prevention programs, \$3 million for After-School Tutorial Programs, and \$3 million for other education and training programs.

## Legal Challenges

In a unanimous decision, a three-judge panel of the Fifth U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld an earlier federal district judge's ruling dismissing a lawsuit filed by Parents Against Testing Before Teaching against the state for its use of the LEAP 21 "high stakes" promotion exam. The court, in an opinion released September 17, 2001, wrote that students do not have a constitutional right to be promoted. Undaunted by this latest ruling against them, a spokesman for the group stated they would ask the full Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals to reconsider the decision, possibly going on to the U. S. Supreme Court.

This latest unsuccessful challenge to the accountability program in federal court, specifically the high stakes testing portion, indicates that the program is relatively safe from legal action. However, if the case continues, there is a remote possibility that a higher court could yet rule against the program.

**Table 2**  
**Legislative Bills Affecting Accountability Program**  
**Killed in Committee (2001 Regular Session)**

| <u>Bill</u>                              | <u>Summary of Proposed Legislation</u>   |
|--|--|
| HB 486 (Walsworth)                       | Prohibit administration of LEAP tests prior to April 1   |
| HB 1854 (J. D. Smith)                    | Exclude students judged to be at least 35% mentally disabled by a medical doctor from taking the LEAP tests  |
| SB 788 (Hainkel) and<br>HB 2016 (Murray) | School districts with 20% or more of their schools labeled "Academically Unacceptable" would turn over control of instructional programs and budgets for the school system from the elected school board to a panel appointed by the governor and BESE |
| HCR 17 (Riddle)                          | Request BESE to move the eighth-grade LEAP 21 test administration to fall of each school year and to provide remediation and retest opportunities in the spring of each year   |
| SB 21 (W. Fields)                        | Prohibit requiring passage of an exam or exams as a qualification or requirement for high school graduation  |
| HCR 10 (Pratt)                           | Request BESE to use fourth- and eighth-grade LEAP 21 tests for diagnostic purposes only and not as the only factor in deciding grade retention   |

**Table 3**  
**Accountability Program Fiscal Year 2001-2002 Funding**

| <u>Program</u>                     | <u>Total Funding</u>   | <u>Increase Over Previous Year</u> |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| K-8 School Reward Program          | \$10 million           | \$10 million                       |
| LEAP 21 Remediation                | \$10 million           | \$2.5 million                      |
| LEAP 21 Tutoring                   | \$7 million            | \$3.2 million                      |
| Graduation Exit Exam Summer School | \$3 million            | \$3 million                        |
| K-8 School Improvement Grants      | \$3 million            | --                                 |
| High School Improvement Grants     | \$750,000              | \$750,000                          |
| Distinguished Educators            | \$4.3 million          | \$2.6 million                      |
| LEAP Testing Program               | <u>\$13.9 million</u>  | <u>\$3.9 million</u>               |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                       | <b>\$51.95 million</b> | <b>\$25.95 million</b>             |

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## Grassroots Opposition

There are indications of growing opposition to the accountability program, primarily in the area of high stakes testing. The NAACP Louisiana State Conference recently passed a resolution calling for the use of the LEAP 21 solely as an assessment tool. The resolution also called for reduced class size, increased teacher pay, and proper funding and resources for the schools. In addition, a New Orleans-based group, Parents for Educational Justice, will be requesting people to sign petitions asking for a moratorium on the retention policy attached to LEAP 21.

Although vocal, the opposition is mainly centered in the New Orleans area and lacks strong support. A recent poll of nearly 500 registered Orleans Parish voters found that 77% either “strongly approved” or “approved” of the current LEAP testing in schools. There was also support across racial lines. Some 93% of white voters polled and 63% of black voters polled indicated approval of LEAP testing.

## Accountability Programs In Other States

Louisiana is not alone in its quest to improve student achievement. Other states are also implementing accountability programs and/or testing programs with varying degrees of success. Opponents of the

accountability program might use other states’ problems to justify a call for a repeal of certain provisions in the state’s plan.

The most common problem facing states is the implementation of a statewide testing program. Louisiana is one of 15 states that administers annual assessments in one or more subjects for grades three through nine, and one of 12 that annually gives assessments in math and English at these grades. Louisiana has one of the nation’s most extensive testing programs, which already implements one aspect of President Bush’s proposed education plan.

Louisiana is also one of only three states (with New Mexico and North Carolina) that have implemented a “high stakes” testing policy that requires a student to pass the state test to be promoted in one or more grades. Three other states (Delaware, Ohio, and South Carolina) are scheduled to adopt “high stakes” testing in 2002, followed by Texas in 2003. At the high school level, Louisiana is one of 18 states that requires passage of a state exam for graduation, while six more states are in the process of implementing such a policy. Most states have a waiver process that allows some students, such as those with disabilities, to earn a diploma or be promoted without meeting the testing requirements.

Several states attempting to implement testing policies have recently experienced difficulties, delays and opposition. See Table 4 for specific examples.

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## Major Milestones Reached

### New Graduation Exit Exam

A major milestone achieved since PAR’s March 2001 report was the administration of the new and more difficult graduation exit exam to the state’s 10th-graders, the GEE 21. The new 10th-grade exam

has two sections (English/language arts and mathematics) instead of three sections (written composition, English, mathematics), with the 11th-grade part still having two sections (social studies and science). The new 11th-grade exams will be administered for the first time in the spring of 2002.

**Table 4**  
**Some of the Difficulties, Delays and Opposition Experienced in Implementing Testing Policies**

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Alaska                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The graduation exit exam requirement was delayed from 2002 to 2004.</li> </ul>  |
| Arizona                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The graduation exit exam requirement was delayed from 2002 to 2006.</li> <li>● The state superintendent presented a plan to offer students who cannot pass the graduation exit exam an alternative route to a high school diploma.</li> <li>● Only 12% of tenth-graders passed the math section of the graduation exit exam in 1999.</li> <li>● A federal civil rights complaint was filed against the graduation exit exam.</li> </ul>   |
| California              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Several schools were ineligible for state performance awards because fewer than 85% of their students took the state exam. State law allows students to opt out of the test with their parents' permission.</li> <li>● The state Board of Education voted to release copies of the graduation exit exam to the public, eliminate the most difficult math problems, and reduce length of the exam by one hour.</li> <li>● The graduation exit exam requirement was delayed from 2004 to 2005.</li> </ul>   |
| Florida                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Roughly 32% of tenth-graders taking the FCAT graduation exit exam failed the reading and math sections in spring 2001. This is the first class required to pass the exam for graduation.</li> </ul>   |
| Massachusetts           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Massachusetts Teachers Association led a protest rally against the state's graduation exit exam, the MCAS.</li> </ul>   |
| New Jersey              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students who flunk the state's exit exam were allowed to receive a high school diploma if they pass a series of performance assessment tasks developed by the state. Statewide, 9% of graduates got their diploma this way last year, with five schools awarding over half of their diplomas to these students.</li> </ul>  |
| New York                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fifteen hundred people marched on the capitol protesting the state's regents' exams. In 2002, students must pass these tests in five subjects to earn a diploma.</li> <li>● The Commissioner of Education rejected a proposal to allow 40 non-traditional schools to substitute individual projects for some of the regents' exams.</li> </ul>  |
| Wyoming                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The graduation exit exam requirement was delayed from 2003 to 2005.</li> </ul>  |
| National Teacher Unions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The NEA supported legislation allowing parents to opt their children out of all mandated standardized tests.</li> <li>● The NEA opposed federal requirements that would make significant decisions about schools, teachers or children based primarily on test scores.</li> <li>● The NEA opposed use of standardized tests when-- <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Results are used as the criterion for the reduction or withholding of any educational funding.</li> <li>2. Results are used to compare students, teachers, programs, schools, communities and states.</li> <li>3. Results are used as a single criterion for "high stakes" decision-making.</li> <li>4. Results lead to sanctions or other punitive actions.</li> <li>5. Every student is required to be tested every year.</li> </ol> </li> </ul> |

Louisiana Department of Education estimates predicted that 35% of the students would fail the math portion of the exam and 28% would fail the English portion statewide. The estimate for math proved accurate with 35% failing the exam. However, students did better than expected on the English portion with only 22% failing.

This group of 10th-graders (class of 2003) who took the GEE 21 for the first time will only be required to pass the math and English sections of the test to graduate. Future classes (class of 2004 and beyond) will have to pass both the English and math sections and either the science or social studies section to graduate. Thus, these students will have to pass three of four sections of a more rigorous exam where students taking the old exam had to pass all five sections.

## 2001 School Performance Scores Released

In November 2001, one accountability cycle ended and two accountability cycles began with the release of the 2000-01 School Performance Scores. This was a major milestone as K-8 schools completed their first two-year accountability cycle, and high schools received their baseline scores to start their first two-year cycle. Schools that failed to meet their growth targets or scored at the “Academically Unacceptable” level were placed in corrective action or, if already in corrective action, advanced to the next level. Each school that exceeds its growth target is eligible for a monetary reward. (See next section.)

The initial results were very promising with nine out of ten K-8 or combination schools improving and nearly 70% of these schools met or exceeded their growth targets. PAR’s next report on education accountability will examine these results in more detail.

## Major Milestones Due in Next Six Months

Two significant events will occur in the next six months. The first is the awarding of monetary rewards to K-8 schools that exceeded their growth targets. The second event is the first administration of the new Graduation Exit Exam (GEE 21) to the state’s 11th-graders.

### School Rewards

With the end of the first cycle, K-8 schools that met or exceeded their growth targets are eligible for rewards. The Legislature appropriated \$10 million to be divided among schools that receive an “Exemplary Academic Growth” label (exceeded growth target by five or more points) or “Recognized Academic Growth” label (school meeting or exceeding its

growth target by less than five points) on a per-pupil basis. In addition, to be eligible for a reward, the school’s student population in the free lunch program (not including reduced lunch students) must have a minimum performance growth of 0.1 points.

The rewards will be sent to schools in March after the Department of Education audits the initial results for discrepancies and individual schools are given a chance to appeal their score. It is estimated that an “Exemplary Growth” school will receive a minimum of \$5,000, or \$26.25 per pupil. A “Recognized Growth” school will receive a minimum of \$2,500, or \$17.50 per pupil. The school’s certificated staff decides how the funding will be spent, but the funding cannot be used for salary stipends.



## New 11th-grade GEE 21 Administered

In March 2002, 11th-graders will take the social studies and science portions of the new

GEE 21 for the first time. Student scores on these exams will be included in the calculation of a school's SPS, but these 11th-graders will not be required to pass these exams to graduate. Future 11th-graders will have to pass one of the two exams to graduate.



## Conclusion

In the past, education reform initiatives often tended to end up watered down, repealed, unfunded or ignored. Thus far, Louisiana's accountability program has avoided those tendencies. In spite of numerous changes since its inception, the program has not been undermined nor significantly weakened. The substantial increase in funding given the program this year indicates that it continues to enjoy strong support from the administration and the Legislature. However, this support could weaken in the

future as the more drastic consequences of the accountability plan are implemented or if student performance fails to improve on the initial gains.

While it is still too early in the implementation process to determine whether the program will be successful, early indications are promising. Actions of the Legislature and other policymakers in 2001 suggest the program will be given the time and opportunity required to prove itself.

# APPENDIX A

## Accountability Policy Changes

BESE approved or further defined several changes to the accountability program since PAR's last report in March. A brief description of the changes follows.

### Complicated SPS Process Adopted

K-8 schools received their third SPS in November 2001 to end the first two-year cycle. Normally, this score would be compared to the 1999 baseline SPS to determine a school's growth and also used as the baseline for the next cycle. But the 1999 baseline SPS was calculated using a LEAP 21 exam with sections on math and English while the 2001 SPS used a LEAP 21 exam that also had sections on science and social studies. To compensate schools for this difference, a growth SPS and performance SPS was calculated.

The growth SPS used the 1999 baseline SPS and a 2001 SPS calculated with scores on the LEAP 21 English and math sections only. The growth SPS was used to determine a school's growth (increase in performance) and assign its growth label and determine its eligibility for a reward.

The performance SPS used the average of the 2000 and 2001 SPS. It included all four sections of LEAP 21 and was used to determine a school's new performance label and growth target for the next cycle.

The higher SPS (growth or performance) was used to determine a school's movement in corrective action level. The desire to compensate schools for the phasing-in of the LEAP 21 has led BESE to adopt a complicated and confusing process. Fortunately, this process will only apply to this cycle, and will not be used in the future.

### Pre-GED Skills Option Program Or Options Program

BESE has mandated that all school districts begin implementing a Pre-GED/Skills Option Program by the 2001-02 school year, with full implementation by the fall of the 2002-03

school year. This program is targeted at those students who are unable or unwilling to complete the requirements for a regular high school degree in the typical four-year period. Thus the program provides an alternative to students to keep them in school instead of dropping out. In addition, the program name has been shortened to the Options Program.

To be eligible for the Options Program, a student must be at least 16 years old and have met at least one of the following criteria:

- Failed the math and/or English/language arts portion of the LEAP 21 eighth-grade exam for one or two years.
- Failed one or more of the four parts of the graduation exit exam.
- Participated in out-of-level testing or alternative assessment.
- Failed to earn more than five Carnegie graduation credits by age 17, ten credits by age 18, or 15 credits by age 19.

Enrollment in the program is voluntary and requires parental or guardian consent, with counseling required. BESE has required that the program be located at a separate site, but it has also been very liberal in granting waivers to school systems due to space availability, transportation problems or other unique reasons.

Students in the program receive academic training (either GED training or traditional high school Carnegie credit courses) for part of the day and skills/job training for the other part. It is an alternative program outside of the regular curriculum of high school studies, but students may continue to earn Carnegie units and even return to the regular program if they show they can complete the requirements for a regular high school diploma. Otherwise they will be eligible for a high school diploma if they pass the GED test or a Certificate of Skills completion if they only complete the skills/job training portion of the program.

School districts are encouraged to work with local businesses, postsecondary institutions, and other organizations in developing coursework for the skills portion of the program



that is recognized by business and industry as valuable job training. If designed properly, students completing the program should be certified in some skill or skills that are needed by area employers without requiring extensive retraining.

Students in the Options Program are still included in the accountability program, with their data included in the sending school's SPS in three ways: Iowa Tests Index, attendance and dropout rates. For each year they are in the program, Options Program students take the ninth-grade Iowa Tests or participate in out-of-level or alternative assessment. Their scores on the Iowa Tests count in the home school's Iowa Tests Index. In addition, if they leave school without either a GED or a Skills Certificate, they are considered dropouts. Options Program students are still counted in the MFP for funding.

## Two School Performance Scores Average



The accountability program assigns a performance label to a school based on its school performance scores (SPS). Schools receive an initial label based on the baseline SPS, with this label updated at the end of every two-year cycle. With two exceptions, the labels are assigned using a fixed SPS range that does not change. The exceptions are the "Academically Above State Average" and "Academically Below State Average" labels which use a moving state average as the dividing point.

The original accountability program rule called for only one state average calculation to determine performance labels. Thus, a high school just entering the accountability program would have to receive an initial performance label based on a state average that included K-8 schools completing their second year in the program. This was seen as being unfair to the high schools, so BESE approved a policy that will use two state averages to calculate performance labels, one for K-8 schools and another for high schools and combination schools. (Note: a combination school is one that includes fourth and/or eighth grade and 10th and/or 11th grade in one school.)

This policy change complicates the accountability program, but it is essentially a neutral change that does not weaken it.

## Growth Label Change



The Accountability Commission recommended that there be four growth labels to describe how well a school

did in meeting its growth target. The original labels were "Exemplary Academic Growth," "Recognized Academic Growth," "Minimal Academic Growth," and "School in Decline." This was later adopted by BESE in the original accountability program rule. BESE has since removed a small portion of the "School in Decline" category and placed it into a new "No Growth" category.

The new label allows schools with a small SPS decline (five points or less) to avoid the harsher "School in Decline" label.

## High School Accountability Phase-in

In early November, high schools received their first, or baseline SPS, marking their entry into the accountability program. This score was calculated using the 10th-grade scores on the English and math portions of the GEE 21 and the ninth-grade Iowa Tests scores. Subsequent scores will also include the 11th-grade scores on the social studies and science portions of the GEE 21.

Since the 2001 SPS baseline is calculated using different variables than the 2002 and 2003 scores, a phase-in process will be used. At the end of the first cycle, a high school's SPS for 2002 and 2003 will be averaged and released as the official score. Instead of issuing two School Performance Scores, as was done for the K-8 schools, only one score will be released and it will be used to determine if the school met its growth target and to assign a new growth target. However, to compensate schools for phasing in the GEE 21, the school's first cycle growth target will be discounted (growth target x 0.75), with this discounted figure used to determine if the school qualifies for rewards or corrective action.

## Combination School Accountability Phase-in

Combination schools (fourth and/or eighth grade and 10th and/or 11th grade) are basically half in and half out of the accountability program. The K-8 components of these schools entered the accountability program in 1999 with the other K-8 schools, receiving a SPS and growth target for only the affected grades. The high school components of these schools entered the accountability program with the other high schools with the release of the November baseline SPS. Since the two components did not enter the accountability program at the same time, a transition plan for these schools was developed.

Like the other K-8 schools, these schools received a growth SPS and a performance SPS in November 2001. The growth SPS for a combination school was calculated using data for the K-8 portion of the school. This score was used to determine a school's success in meeting its growth target. Like other K-8 schools, combination schools are eligible for rewards or placed in corrective action based on their performance.

The new performance SPS for combination schools was based on two years of K-8 data and one year of high school data. This score is the school's new baseline and it enters the accountability system in the first cycle like the other high schools with two exceptions:

- 1) If the school was placed in corrective action because of its K-8 performance, it will remain in corrective action.
- 2) The school's new growth target is not discounted like the other high schools.

## Public School Choice

East Baton Rouge, East Carroll, Orleans, and Pointe Coupee parish school districts had "Academically Unacceptable" K-8 schools in Level I Corrective Action based on their initial 1999 SPS. Based on later scores, it was anticipated that some schools would not improve sufficiently to exit the "Academically Unacceptable" category, thus placing these schools in Level II Corrective Action and making their students eligible for public school choice. To prepare for this, BESE required these school districts to develop and submit a plan on how they would implement public school choice.

Both East Baton Rouge and Orleans parishes requested a waiver from BESE. East Baton Rouge Parish claimed that the desegregation order prevented them from offering public school choice because of attendance zones, enrollment caps, and transfer policies set by a federal court consent decree. BESE granted the waiver but required a detailed plan on how the district was going to improve the affected schools.

Orleans Parish had a different problem. Due to the large number of "Academically Unacceptable" schools in the parish, there was insufficient room at other schools to accept the transferring students. The school district offered a plan that allowed some transfers, but also established "Learning Academies" at several of the "Academically Unacceptable" K-8 schools. These schools would receive additional resources including:

- New principal, with \$8,000 bonus,
- All certified teachers,
- \$2,500 bonus per teacher,
- Full-time social worker and nurse,
- Smaller classes,
- Staff development teacher,
- Curriculum specialist,
- Administrative assistant to principal,
- Parent resource center, and
- State-appointed "Distinguished Educator."

Several problems have already occurred with the "Learning Academies." Principals were discouraged from applying for the "Learning Academy" positions thus limiting the applicant pool. In addition, the school district could not find enough certified teachers to fill all teaching positions at the academies.

## Data Audit and Investigation

Data problems and other events have convinced BESE and the Louisiana Department of Education that an audit and investigation policy is needed. Under a new rule approved by BESE, an audit or investigation would be conducted if a school:

- Was selected as part of a routine audit of a random sample of all accountability schools.
- Was the subject of a signed complaint. (Anonymous complaints may be investigated if warranted.)
- Reported suspect or erroneous data or had suspected test irregularities (i.e., high erasure rate on tests, large changes in data, inconsistent data, etc.).

Suspected testing irregularities are to be investigated by the school district with a report sent to the Louisiana Superintendent of Education. If the superintendent is not satisfied with the results of the investigation, a team can be sent to the school to conduct its own investigation. For other accountability data, the Louisiana Department of Education can audit the school to verify the data. If the audit cannot verify the accuracy of the school's data, BESE will decide what data will be used to calculate the school's SPS.

# Proposals Still Under Consideration

## High School Diploma Options

BESE initially considered a controversial proposal to add several high school diploma options. (See PAR's March report entitled *Close-up on Education Accountability*.) Although the original proposal would have added two advanced and two lower level diploma options to the current diploma requirement, recent debate has centered on the two advanced diplomas, the "Academic Enhancement" and "Career/Technical Enhancement."

Final approval for the advanced diplomas was delayed due to concerns that the requirements for the "Academic Enhancement" endorsement were too low, with students earning this endorsement possibly requiring remedial courses when entering college.

## District Accountability

One component of the state's accountability program that has yet to be implemented is the district accountability system. The District and School Accountability Advisory Commission recommended to BESE in May 2001 a basic framework for district accountability. This proposal has been presented to several groups for review and comment, evaluated using data collected by the

Department of Education, and modified as needed to correct deficiencies. BESE has not finally approved the system, but approval is anticipated in time for district scores to be released in March 2002.

Two statistics are reported for each district: a District Performance Score (DPS) and a District Responsibility Index (DRI). The DPS is a roll-up of the School Performance Scores for all of the schools in the district. The DRI is a weighted average of the following four indicators:

- Improvement in the pass rate for students taking the LEAP 21 exam for the first time.
- Effectiveness of summer school in retraining students who failed LEAP 21.
- Overall success of district's schools in meeting their growth target.
- Percentage of certified teachers in all of the district's schools and its low performing schools.

The DRI is a growth indicator, so districts with low performing schools could get a good DRI label if their schools' and students' performance is improving at an acceptable rate.

## APPENDIX B

### Louisiana Student Test Results Improve

Improving student achievement is the ultimate goal of the accountability program. Therefore, the state's accountability program appears to be on track as test scores continue to show improvement. This is seen in the rise in LEAP 21 and Iowa Tests scores, but more importantly in the rise of test scores on the NAEP national exams. On the NAEP 2000 math exam, a sample of Louisiana's fourth-graders had the highest gain over their 1996 scores and the eighth-graders tied with Virginia's with the third highest increase. Also important to note is that the LEAP 21 exam was supposed to model NAEP standards. The similar percentage of students scoring below basic on both exams indicates that this goal has been essentially achieved.

The average NAEP scale score in math for the nation's fourth-graders has consistently risen, increasing seven points from 219 in 1992 to 226 in 2000. However, the average score for Louisiana's fourth-graders for the same period rose 14 points. Louisiana's fourth-grade average lagged the nation by 15 points in 1992, but the deficit was cut to eight points in 2000. (See Appendix Table 1.)

Louisiana's eighth-graders also improved, going from an average score of 246 in 1990 to 259 in 2000. The state's eighth-graders had a 13 point improvement compared to a national improvement of 12 points, or going from a 16 point deficit in 1990 to 15 points in 2000.

Besides the improvement in average scores, the percentage of students in Louisiana scoring below the basic level has steadily decreased for both grades on the LEAP 21 and NAEP math exams.

The recent NAEP math results are very encouraging, showing a good rise in scores in a subject in which the state's students have the most difficulty. However, they are still far below the scores of students in other states. The state's students still rank at the bottom in student achievement among the participating states and there is still considerable improvement needed.

Generally, the percentage of students failing the LEAP 21 fourth and eighth grade tests has decreased. (See Appendix Table 2.) Students scoring at the "Unsatisfactory" level face remediation in the failed subject(s) and grade retention. In addition, the scores on the Iowa Tests at all grades have risen showing an across-the-board improvement in student achievement as measured by two independent sources. (See Appendix Table 3.)

Orleans Parish continued to make progress on its long journey to improve student achievement, even though its path is much longer and more difficult. Student scores once again improved, but not enough for many "Academically Unacceptable" schools who will go into Corrective Action level II. But the good news is that the district saw enough improvement that the number of "Academically Unacceptable" K-8 schools was reduced from 47 to 21 schools.

The rise in test scores is encouraging, but the increases must occur over a longer period before the program can be declared successful. Some of the early gains may be attributed to students and teachers becoming accustomed to the new tests and curriculums being aligned more effectively with the tests. At some point, gains in student achievement will level off if districts do not find more effective methods to teach the historically harder-to-educate student.

This problem can be seen now in one area. The failure rate for repeaters on the LEAP 21 exams is still very high. These students have completed a full year of remediation and still cannot pass the test(s). One plausible explanation is that these students are so far behind that the remediation program cannot bring them up to an acceptable level in the short period allowed. These students will eventually leave the school system and be replaced by better prepared students, therefore allowing a more accurate assessment of the state's or districts' remediation efforts. This is an area that demands careful monitoring to ensure that an effective remediation program is adopted to bring these students up to an acceptable academic level.

As seen in Appendix Table 4, the rate at which students are being retained in the same grade is generally increasing, rising to almost 11% of all students statewide. As expected, the largest increases occurred at the fourth- and eighth-grade level where "high stakes" testing provisions were implemented. The data also shows a high retention rate for third- and seventh-graders, indicating that many schools are holding back students before they face the "high stakes" requirements.

The LEAP 21 tests are supposed to hold back students who are not prepared for the next level of work. Thus, for the 2001-02 school year, there should be a reduction in the percentage of students being held back at the fifth and ninth grades because these students are better prepared for studies at that level.

**Appendix Table 1  
Comparison of NAEP and LEAP 21 Results in Mathematics**

| Year | Fourth Grade  |                  |                                |                                | Eighth Grade  |                  |                                |                                |
|------|---------------|------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|      | NAEP          |                  | LEAP 21                        |                                | NAEP          |                  | LEAP 21                        |                                |
|      | State Average | National Average | % Students Scoring Below Basic | % Students Scoring Below Basic | State Average | National Average | % Students Scoring Below Basic | % Students Scoring Below Basic |
| 1990 | –             | –                | –                              | –                              | 246           | 262              | 68%                            | –                              |
| 1992 | 204           | 219              | 61%                            | –                              | 250           | 267              | 63%                            | –                              |
| 1996 | 209           | 222              | 56%                            | –                              | 252           | 271              | 62%                            | –                              |
| 1999 | –             | –                | –                              | 59%                            | –             | –                | –                              | 61%                            |
| 2000 | 218           | 226              | 43%                            | 51%                            | 259           | 274              | 52%                            | 53%                            |
| 2001 | –             | –                | –                              | 46%                            | –             | –                | –                              | 54%                            |

SOURCE: Louisiana Department of Education (LEAP 21) and National Center for Education Statistics (NAEP).

**Appendix Table 2  
Comparison of Orleans Parish and Statewide Public Schools  
LEAP 21 Spring Test Results  
Percentage of Students Scoring at Unsatisfactory Level**

| Year |          | English/Language Arts |         |              |         | Mathematics  |         |              |         |
|------|----------|-----------------------|---------|--------------|---------|--------------|---------|--------------|---------|
|      |          | Fourth Grade          |         | Eighth Grade |         | Fourth Grade |         | Eighth Grade |         |
|      |          | Statewide             | Orleans | Statewide    | Orleans | Statewide    | Orleans | Statewide    | Orleans |
| 1999 | Total    | 21%                   | 44%     | 21%          | 45%     | 35%          | 63%     | 40%          | 70%     |
| 2000 | Total    | 20%                   | 45%     | 13%          | 37%     | 28%          | 55%     | 32%          | 63%     |
| 2001 | Total    | 16%                   | 34%     | 15%          | 41%     | 23%          | 45%     | 31%          | 62%     |
|      | Initial  | 16%                   | –       | 15%          | –       | 22%          | –       | 27%          | –       |
|      | Repeater | 29%                   | –       | 58%          | –       | 39%          | –       | 60%          | –       |

SOURCE: Louisiana Department of Education.

NOTE: Statewide figures include Orleans Parish schools.

**Appendix Table 3**  
**Iowa Tests**  
**Composite National Percentile Rank of the Average Standard Score**

| Year | Division  | Grade |    |    |    |    |
|------|-----------|-------|----|----|----|----|
|      |           | 3     | 5  | 6  | 7  | 9  |
| 1999 | Statewide | 45    | 44 | 45 | 44 | 44 |
|      | Orleans   | 23    | 23 | 26 | 24 | 28 |
| 2000 | Statewide | 47    | 46 | 47 | 46 | 46 |
|      | Orleans   | 25    | 25 | 27 | 25 | 29 |
| 2001 | Statewide | 50    | 52 | 48 | 47 | 50 |
|      | Orleans   | 28    | 38 | 30 | 28 | 39 |

SOURCE: Louisiana Department of Education.

NOTE: Statewide figures include Orleans Parish schools.

**Appendix Table 4**  
**1997-98 to 2000-01 K-12 Grade-Level Retention Rates**  
**in Orleans Parish Public Schools and Statewide**

| Grade         | 1997-98   |         | 1998-99   |         | 1999-2000 |         | 2000-01   |         |
|---------------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
|               | Statewide | Orleans | Statewide | Orleans | Statewide | Orleans | Statewide | Orleans |
| K             | 8.7%      | 3.6%    | 8.6%      | 6.0%    | 9.1%      | 3.6%    | 9.6%      | 4.1%    |
| 1             | 11.2      | 8.1     | 11.3      | 12.3    | 12.6      | 11.7    | 13.2      | 16.1    |
| 2             | 5.6       | 6.4     | 6.1       | 10.8    | 6.5       | 8.8     | 6.7       | 10.4    |
| 3             | 4.5       | 5.7     | 4.9       | 9.3     | 5.8       | 8.1     | 7.1       | 11.1    |
| 4             | 4.3       | 4.2     | 5.0       | 8.4     | 5.4       | 7.3     | 17.1      | 40.2    |
| 5             | 3.4       | 3.4     | 4.5       | 8.6     | 4.6       | 6.3     | 5.5       | 7.1     |
| 6             | 5.8       | 4.9     | 7.3       | 7.7     | 8.2       | 10.0    | 9.1       | 9.1     |
| 7             | 9.2       | 6.8     | 10.1      | 7.8     | 10.9      | 13.6    | 12.3      | 14.0    |
| 8             | 5.8       | 7.5     | 6.4       | 6.0     | 6.1       | 9.1     | 20.7      | 50.2    |
| 9             | 16.6      | 15.3    | 16.9      | 16.0    | 15.7      | 18.8    | 15.3      | 15.6    |
| 10            | 10.5      | 9.3     | 9.9       | 10.3    | 9.7       | 11.8    | 9.2       | 8.8     |
| 11            | 6.3       | 7.1     | 5.7       | 7.9     | 6.2       | 10.1    | 6.0       | 7.3     |
| 12            | 4.3       | 7.7     | 4.6       | 9.3     | 4.1       | 11.0    | 4.6       | 11.5    |
| State Average | 7.5%      | 6.8%    | 8.0%      | 9.3%    | 8.3%      | 9.9%    | 10.7%     | 15.9%   |

SOURCE: Louisiana Department of Education.



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4664 Jamestown Avenue, Suite 300  
P.O. Box 14776

Baton Rouge, LA 70898-4776

Phone: (225) 926-8414

Fax: (225) 926-8417

E-mail: [staff@la-par.org](mailto:staff@la-par.org)

or [jimbrandt@la-par.org](mailto:jimbrandt@la-par.org)

[www.la-par.org](http://www.la-par.org)

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