

LEVEL 1 - 1 OF 345 STORIES

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The News and Observer (Raleigh, NC)

June 6, 1997 Friday, DURHAM EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. A1

LENGTH: 757 words

HEADLINE: Test scores of Durham students rise

BYLINE: KELLY THOMPSON COCHRAN, STAFF WRITER

BODY:

DURHAM -- Most reading, writing and math scores rose again in Durham elementary and middle schools this spring, though no other grade levels matched the system's progress on eighth-grade exams released earlier this week.

Preliminary results released Thursday indicate that Durham students in grades three to eight maintained or slightly improved their performance on 10 of 14 state tests this spring. Math scores improved at most grade levels, while reading and writing scores rose in some grades and fell in others.

By far the largest gains came in eighth grade, where a new policy requires that students who fail the state tests either attend summer school or be held back a year. The district's average reading score increased 1.7 points to 161.1, and its math average jumped 2.2 points to 171.6.

The state's testing system measures all students in grades three to eight on a 100-point scale, and most children generally improve their scores by only four or five points from one grade level to the next. Thus, the eighth-grade improvements represent a major increase.

With the exception of strong math scores at the elementary level, the district's other improvements were much smaller. But school officials are pleased with the system's cumulative progress during the past five years and predicted that this spring's hard work has laid the foundation for larger gains.

"I am very happy for our teachers and principals, and most of all for the children," Superintendent Ann Denlinger said. "We hope this is the first year of a very sharp upward spiral."

The only major disappointment in the test scores was on the seventh-grade writing exams given in March, which have seesawed in recent years. The number of students passing the exam rose 16 percentage points last spring to 49 percent, but dropped by the same amount this year. As a result, only about a third of Durham students passed the exam.

Administrators said they aren't sure what happened, but pointed out that the state and most other districts' averages dropped as well. On the plus side, Durham's fourth-graders improved their passing rate from 41 percent to nearly 45 percent even as the state average declined to 49 percent.



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"We're not up to the state average yet, but we're closing the gap," testing administrator David Holdzkom said.

Because the state reading and math tests weren't administered until late May, results are still incomplete for most grades. State averages are not yet available, and Durham officials are still double-checking exact counts on how many students passed each exam. They plan to release that information, along with racial breakdowns, next week.

At the middle school level, the district's average tests scores suggested that sixth- and seventh-graders have held their ground this spring after significant improvements in math in previous years. Reading scores also dropped slightly after earlier improvements.

Middle schools director Elsa Woods said she was not sure if the heavy emphasis on meeting the new eighth-grade requirement might have distracted attention from the earlier grades, but she said that several improvements are already under way for 1997-98.

For instance, the system is planning additional training for writing teachers and is working to add literacy specialists who will concentrate on basic reading skills that are not usually covered in the middle-school curriculum. The district also might look at adding extra writing tests between grades four and seven to help students polish their skills.

"We all want to continue the progress," Woods said.

At the elementary level, average math scores jumped significantly this spring, rising by 0.8 in grades three and four and 1.3 points in grade five. School officials said increased emphasis on hands-on activities and materials appears to be paying off.

"We've been doing math training at all grade levels," elementary schools director Gene Chasin said.

Elementary reading scores made relatively little change this year except a 0.6 rise in fifth grade and the larger jump in eighth. But officials expect them to improve rapidly in the next several years as the result of a major new literacy initiative in earlier grades.

Teachers for kindergarten, first grade and second grade have received intensive training over the past nine months on how to boost reading skills, but their students are so young that the state does not test them. The school system's goal is that 95 percent of third-graders will pass state reading tests by the year 2000.

GRAPHIC: graphic; Durham 1996-97 test scores; Staff

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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The Morning Call (Allentown)

May 23, 1997, Friday, FOURTH EDITION

SECTION: BETHLEHEM, Pg. B4

LENGTH: 278 words

HEADLINE: NORTHAMPTON STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES IMPROVE;
* SCHOOL DISTRICT EMPHASIZED IMPORTANCE OF STUDENT PREPARATION.

BYLINE: KATHLEEN PARRISH; The Morning Call

BODY:

Standardized test scores of Northampton students improved this year because the district placed more emphasis on preparing for and taking the test, according to interim Superintendent Thomas Persing.

"The quality increase in academic performance will continue to happen if we all emphasize its importance," he said.

The largest improvement was made in the seventh grade, where 67 percent of the class scored above the national average on the California Test of Basic Skills, up from 57 percent last year.

In ninth grade, 65 percent of the students scored above the national average, compared to 62 percent last year. And in 10th grade, 69 percent of the students exceeded national figures, up from 66 percent.

The test covers study skills, science, social studies, reading, language and math. At the direction of the school board, more emphasis was placed on improving standardized test scores this year, said junior high Principal Roger Washburn.

The first thing the schools did was to stress the importance of the three-day tests to students and parents, Washburn said.

The schools served free breakfast and students were allowed to go home after completing each day's test.

"The kids had to focus only on the testing for three days," said senior high Principal Frank Kovacs. "They didn't need to be worried about studying for an exam later in the afternoon."

Calculators also were supplied and only one standardized test was given this year to a grade level, Washburn said.

"In past years, we gave more than one test and we felt there was a burnout effect," he said.

Pennsylvania assessment test scores will be released in the fall.



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LEVEL 1 - 10 OF 345 STORIES

Copyright 1997 Chicago Tribune Company
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May 23, 1997 Friday, NORTH SPORTS FINAL EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 1; ZONE: N

LENGTH: 899 words

HEADLINE: TEST SCORES SOAR AT CITY SCHOOLS ON PROBATION;
NUMBERS UP, BUT STILL BELOW NATIONAL NORM

BYLINE: By Janita Poe, Tribune Education Writer.

BODY:

Last fall when Chicago Public Schools chief Paul Vallas placed more than 100 schools on academic probation, many students and officials expressed embarrassment--even anger--that their schools were being singled out for the bureaucratic equivalent of a trip to the principal's office.

Now, with the release Thursday of scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills for Grades 3 through 8 showing marked improvement in many schools on probation, officials at some of those schools say it was that very attention and pressure that seems to have gotten results.

Whether the slew of probation managers, external partners and other visits by the central administration produced tangible changes in instruction remains debatable. But one thing seems indisputable: Probation delivered a psychological punch.

"What these scores tell me is that probation is working," Vallas said.

Of the 71 elementary schools on probation, 54 improved in reading and 69 in math, according to preliminary reports on the test scores. On Thursday, officials said 22 of those schools are now eligible to be removed from the designation.

Overall, 393 of the city's 473 elementary schools tested improved in math and 271 had higher scores in reading than the previous year. Schools doubling their test scores in at least one of the subjects included Beidler, McNair, Carver Middle and Morse.

School administrators plan a news conference to discuss the scores at 10:30 a.m. Friday at the Parkman School.

Pat Harvey, the schools' accountability chief, said she was encouraged by the scores because of gains made by the poorest performing students.

"The lowest performing students are getting better, and so are the two groups next to them," said Harvey. ". . . I think the message is that all kids, regardless of where they are born, regardless of their station in life or their race, can achieve."



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The release of the preliminary data--a small percentage of makeup tests were not included--was being pointed to by Vallas' allies as proof that the new management team for schools is succeeding. Earlier this month, school leaders announced even greater gains in high school students' scores on the Test of Achievement and Proficiency.

But some school-reform leaders say the scores are indicative of improvements implemented over the last decade, not any recent revamping.

"There's been a trend of improvement over the last seven years, and we're pleased to see that trend is continuing," said Donald Moore, executive director of Designs for Change, an educational research and reform group.

"I think principal leadership, the involvement of the local school councils and the commitment of teachers to working together have paid off."

Though the overall scores improved, that improvement was not seen uniformly. For instance, pupils at or above national norms in reading comprehension declined slightly for the system's 3rd, 6th and 8th grades.

And scores of 30.1 percent in reading and 35.6 percent in math mean that the vast majority of students were below national norms.

For schools on probation, the improved scores were a reason to rejoice.

Geraldine Moore, principal of Beidler in the Garfield Park neighborhood on the West Side, said her staff initially was "devastated" about being placed on probation. But the status also was a "wakeup call" to improve standards at the school, she said.

"We wanted to know 'Why, what had we done wrong?' " said Moore, a former parent aide who has been principal of the school since 1994. "But what we did was to turn it into a reaffirmation. We looked at our weaknesses and set out to improve them."

The work apparently paid off: Reading scores at Beidler more than tripled--from 10.2 in 1996 to 33.3 in 1997--and those in math rose from 24.8 to 36.3 during that same period.

Moore said the renewed commitment spilled over to the five-member probation management team, set up in October and headed by West Side education legend Marva Collins. The team implemented many of Collins' methods--including a focus on phonics and repetition--and also began following her lead on student encouragement and regimented daily schedules.

Beidler also was one of 132 schools to set up extended school days this year; the school added two hours of optional math and reading study for four days a week after school. By early winter, Beidler had developed a motto, prominently displayed on the school marquee: "Probation brings opportunity."

Principals at other schools posting improvements also said the probation status forced them to focus on specific problems at their schools.



Chicago Tribune, May 23, 1997

Albert Gaston, principal at the Fulton School in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, said his school was "already on its course" and did not modify any curriculum, programs or instruction methods. But he said teacher and student motivation increased after the school went on probation.

Though the overall scores improved, that improvement was not seen uniformly. For instance, pupils at or above national norms in reading comprehension declined slightly for the system's 3rd, 6th and 8th grades.

Vallas and other officials said they hope to make even more significant improvements on testing in the next few years. The increases made by the probation schools, they said, prove any school can succeed if goals and priorities are set for them.

GRAPHIC: PHOTOS 2 GRAPHICPHOTO: Beidler Elementary School Principal Geraldine Moore gets a hug from 3rd grader Lawrence Barron.; PHOTO: Two Beidler Elementary School 3rd graders enthusiastically compete to answer math questions in class. Tribune photos by Chuck Berman.; GRAPHIC: Citywide test scores improving.; - How test scores breakdown.; - Scoring at or above the national norm.; Source: Chicago Public Schools.; Chicago Tribune.; See microfilm for complete graphic.

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56. Los Angeles Times

* 05/21/97; Edition: Ventura County Edition; Section: Metro; Zones Desk; Page B-1

Students Now Must Learn the Hard Way; Education: Santa Paula High will dump standard classes and require college prep for everyone.

By REGINA HONG
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

SANTA PAULA — For decades, Santa Paula High School held to their academic hierarchy: one system for the advanced placement and honor students, another for college prep students and a third and by far the largest group in standardized courses, designed to teach just the basics.

Not anymore.

Determined to boost academic performance in a district that has for years landed at the bottom of county test scores and four-year college attendance rates, administrators are eliminating the standard courses next year and pushing the students into the more rigorous college prep courses.

In September, students from the bottom of the academic totem pole can expect to sit next to the straight-A students. Standards will be raised, said Principal Tony Gaitan. "You'll know what it's like to be in a rigorous program. You'll know what it means to be challenged and you'll know what it means to study hard."

Teachers are deeply divided over the plan, worried that the timeline is too quick and that the system will set students up for failure. But the school is already making changes for next year's transition.

The campus recently began holding tutoring/homework periods from 6 to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday. For the first time, administrators will require freshmen to attend summer school if they are behind in math or reading skills. A remedial math and English class will be offered to freshmen who are still below grade level.

Campus administrators have also been consulting with Los Angeles' Garfield High School, made famous by the 1988 movie "Stand and Deliver," about math teacher Jaime Escalante's quest to raise standards. Garfield has a similar student demographic to Santa Paula High, although it moved more slowly, switching over in seven years.

The change next year has some students both excited and nervous.

"I think it's going to be difficult," said freshman Evelyn Martinez. "They're going to be giving us more work and I don't think the teacher will be able to explain it to each of us."

But Evelyn also thinks she'll learn a lot faster.

While the plan is a hotly debated matter on campus, at least one class eliminated standard classes a decade ago. Science teacher Ray Sepulveda's classroom could be a model for the rest of the school.

Here junior Esiquio Delgado whips easily through his zoology anatomy exam, identifying parts of a clam, such as the kidney and foot. Esiquio's classmates range from A students to those who read at the third-grade level.

All students in this college prep course must master the same material.

Ten years ago, with permission from the administration and department, Sepulveda eliminated the less challenging standard track course and allowed all students to enroll in the college prep course, which requires additional homework and places greater emphasis on problem-solving skills.

"We've been doing it the way the whole school should be," Sepulveda said.

Esiquio, currently enrolled in all college prep classes, envisions that students from standard classes will benefit from the push.

"I think it's a good idea," Esiquio said. "You'll be able to learn more. There are some people [in standard classes] able to do it, but they just don't want to do it because they're lazy."

At the 1,314-student campus, the honor students typically scooped up top awards in county contests, while the majority of the student body lagged behind. Honor students this year landed first place in the county's Knowledge Bowl, second place in the Geography Bowl and won the \$1,000 Amgen award at the county science fair.

But teachers and parents hungered for a change, something that could boost the performance of the entire student body.

In the mainly blue-collar town, typically 5% to 10% of students enroll in four-year colleges, far below county average. The campus usually is at the bottom of the pack in standardized test scores in the county. Even when compared with other state schools with similar ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, the campus still ranked at the bottom quarter on last year's SAT.

"If we've been the lowest for so long, something needs to change," said school's activities director Lisa Salas, who also graduated from the school.

The change won't be easy.

When school administrators in February announced the decision to drop all standard courses by next year, a number of teachers left the conference room fuming. Others left as if in a state of shock.

It wasn't that they disagreed with raising student standards. Teachers said there just wasn't enough time to implement a plan like this by next school year, and the result could be widespread student failure or the watering down of difficult college prep courses.

The college prep courses require more work than students in standard classes may be accustomed to. For example, students in the freshman standard English course were required to read a literature textbook and one additional novel "To Kill a Mockingbird." The college prep course requires the same textbooks as well as four or five additional novels accompanied by book reports.

"The English department really and truly agrees with the idea that standards need to be raised, but we don't think that by calling [students] all college prep that that's going to change things," said English teacher Jeri Cook.

Students who receive an A in college prep courses next fall will also be encouraged to move up to the advanced placement and honor class, a move that

LEVEL 1 - 17 OF 345 STORIES

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The Tampa Tribune

May 16, 1997, Friday, METRO EDITION

SECTION: POLK, Pg. 1

LENGTH: 638 words

HEADLINE: Schools show improved test scores

BYLINE: BETH FOUSHEE; of The Tampa Tribune

BODY:

SUMMARY: Some Polk County schools still fall below national standards in reading and math, but they showed gains, especially some elementary schools.

LAKELAND - Where there's a will, there's a way.

Many Polk County students tested below the national average on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, or CTBS, a national assessment measuring mastery of reading comprehension and mathematics concepts.

But the county's elementary schools showed great gains, especially some that deal daily with poverty and high mobility among their students - schools put on the state's list of "critically low-performing schools."

The CTBS results reached students and parents this week. The analyzed, countywide results were released by school officials Thursday.

At Eastside Elementary in Haines City, one of two Polk schools on the state list, test results soared 40 points in math. About 70 percent of students there scored above the national norm, up from 30 percent last year.

In reading, 43 percent of Eastside students scored above the national norm, compared with 25 percent last year.

Scores in a statewide writing-assessment test, released a week ago, also showed impressive gains at Eastside.

Winston Elementary in Lakeland, the second Polk school on the state list, also gained ground from a year earlier, although at a much less dramatic rate.

Both schools are expected to come off the state list in the fall.

Polk's elementary school students showed gains in math and reading in every grade that takes the CTBS test. The CTBS test is given to third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students in elementary school.



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In math, 57 percent of the county's fourth-graders scored above the national average in math, compared with 54 percent last year. Fifty-four percent of the third-graders scored above the national norm, up from 53 percent.

Fifty-four percent of the fifth-graders scored above average, compared with 48 percent last year.

In reading, 51 percent of the third-graders scored above the national average, up from 49 percent; 46 percent of fourth-graders scored above average, compared with 44 percent, and 45 percent of fifth-graders scored above average, up from 44 percent.

Babson Park Elementary ranked first-place in math among elementary schools, with 96 percent of students taking the test surpassing statewide criteria. First-place in reading among elementary schools was Brigham Academy in Winter Haven and Valleyview Elementary in Lakeland, with 75 percent of students at each surpassing the criteria.

State standards say at least 33 percent of the students in elementary schools must score above the national norm to remain off the state's low-achieving list.

Middle school students' scores dropped slightly countywide.

In math, half of the eighth-graders scored above the national norm, compared with 52 percent last year; 45 percent of the seventh-graders scored above the median - equaling last year's score. Forty-eight percent of sixth-graders scored above the norm, up from 45 percent.

In reading, 51 percent of the eighth-graders scored above the national norm, down from 55 percent last year; 44 percent of the seventh-graders scored above the norm, the same as last year. Among sixth-graders, 40 percent scored above the norm, down from 41 percent a year earlier.

Lakeland Middle Academy had the highest scores among middle schools, with 85 percent in math and 83 percent in reading.

State standards say that 40 percent of the students in middle schools must score above the national norm.

Averages on how high school students countywide performed on the CTBS weren't released from the district Thursday.

The Harrison Center for the Visual and Performing Arts in Lakeland had the highest scores among high schools: 94 percent in reading, 93 percent in math.

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05-03 10:46a Clinton, GOP agree to
 balance budget, cut taxes over five years
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 embargoed for 11:06■

68. Associated Press

05-03 8:20a

Schools seek ways to challenge students

LONDON, Ky. (AP) - Several Kentucky school districts have raised their graduation standards above the state's minimum 20 credits, but Laurel County is easily the most ambitious.

South Laurel and North Laurel high schools now require 28 credits. South Laurel also requires a senior research project and will add an extracurricular activity requirement next year.

Parents and teachers there decided to make high school tougher to get students' attention.

Principal Roger L. Marcum has seen high schoolers cruise through their senior years like zombies.

Educators say it is a familiar shuffle. A lot of teen-agers across the state have found all sorts of ways to get a diploma without getting serious about their studies.

South Laurel has scrapped business math, consumer math, and other basic math courses and now starts freshmen in pre-algebra. Most students earn their math credits in algebra and geometry. Science has gotten a similar facelift.

"We don't just count credits anymore," Marcum said. "There is no more math for the living dead."

Senior Daniel Carter, 17, said he would have preferred to not sweat out his senior year, but can see the benefits of his extra work. With less than a month of school left, he is sweating out his senior presentation on classical mythology.

Tempted to cut corners and enjoy his final weeks, Carter said the requirements are forcing him to stay focused, teaching him about discipline and time management.

"People will tell you it's a pain, but mostly it's a good thing," he said.

The shift toward more academic heavy lifting at South Laurel has been accompanied by a focus on more active

student learning.

The school's greenhouse has become primarily a horticulture lab for students instead of just another place where locals stock up on geraniums. The school has also opened a small-scale working bank where students can get loans for anything from lunch money to prom expenses and work out a payment plan.

Laurel County's two high school councils voluntarily raised standards. And soon, the state may follow, boosting minimum requirements for the class that is now finishing eighth grade.

A legislative panel is scheduled to rule May 13 on raising the state's high school graduation requirements.

The increase would put algebra, biology and art on the schedules of all Kentucky students. States such as Alabama and Florida have recently moved to make high school more challenging. Georgia, Louisiana and North Carolina all now require Algebra I for graduates.

But many educators remain uncertain what effects the change will have in the state's high schools.

If the requirements go through, mathematics credits must be earned in algebra, geometry or some other course higher than the general math many schools now offer.

State officials have always emphasized that its requirements were merely minimum expectations. But some Kentucky teachers wonder if students here can handle even that.

Barbara Miller, who teaches an employability skills class at Breckenridge County High School, fears that her students may be the ones who lose if requirements go up.

"It may be wonderful for 80 percent of the kids, but there are also kids who are not going to be able to move beyond jobs

at Hardee's," she said. "Why do they need algebra? Let's give them what they are going to use in life."

Pat Hurt, the state education department official who has shepherded the higher requirements through four years of debate and revision, said high schools need to change.

"The whole point is to make high school more meaningful," she said. "In national polls, a great majority of high schoolers themselves say they want it to be more challenging."

At South Laurel High, a school where parents, students and teachers have already had to make such adjustments, experience shows that while tougher requirements are a hard sell, they can also get the attention of students cruising through their final years of school.

"We feel like we don't have a choice but to raise expectations," said principal Marcum. "We'd like to make our diplomas mean something again."

Since the school council opted for higher requirements, test scores have increased at both of the county's high schools. High schools statewide have struggled to keep pace with the state's test-score improvement goals, but both Laurel County schools earned cash bonuses from the state. At South Laurel, the number of students taking the ACT and SAT college-entrance exams are up as well.

But dropout rates have accelerated, too. After holding steady at just over 6 percent through the 1993-94 school year, the rate jumped to nearly 9 percent in 1994-95, the state's most recent dropout figures. The higher requirements had been in place for two years by the 1994-95 school year.

The state average has crept up toward 4 percent.■

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THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

April 30, 1997, Wednesday, HOME FINAL EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 31A

LENGTH: 872 words

HEADLINE: Districts celebrate TAAS progress;
Sophomore skills test scores up in reading, writing, math

BYLINE: Anna Macias, Staff Writer of The Dallas Morning News

BODY:

Most Dallas-Fort Worth area school districts Tuesday were celebrating improved performance by sophomores on the state's graduation exam.

In Dallas, for example, 10th-grade students scored higher than ever on the reading, math and writing sections of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills.

About 6,800 students took the test, with 78 percent passing reading, a 14 percent increase from the performance of sophomores four years ago. The passing rate for math was 60 percent, 18 percent higher than it was four years ago. About 80 percent of the students passed writing, an increase of about 11 percent from 1994.

"These results are simply remarkable," Superintendent Yvonne Gonzalez said. "To see gains across the board in every category is nearly impossible. This is the best news we've had in a long time."

Dallas school officials did not make available the number of students who passed all sections of the test.

Bill Webster, the district's director of research and evaluation, said the district is more focused on "outcome measures."

"Schools are looked at in terms of their effectiveness, and teachers are looked at in terms of their effectiveness," he said.

"All of that translates into more focused instruction, in terms of not only the TAAS, but hopefully the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and other measures that we use."

Dallas school officials said they were happy that the achievement gap between ethnic minorities and whites seemed to have narrowed. The 155,000-student school district is 87 percent minority.

African-American 10th-graders were 31 points behind their white peers in 1993 on the reading section of the test but this year are only 14 points apart. Eighty percent of the African-American sophomores passed the reading section of the test. In the math portion, 60 percent passed, and in writing, 83 percent.



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Hispanic sophomores also achieved their best scores yet - 69 percent in reading and 72 percent in writing - but Dr. Gonzalez said she was disappointed that only 53 percent passed the math section.

"I know we can do better, and we will," she said.

Passing rates among white students were 94 percent in reading, 82 in math and 93 in the writing portion.

In Mesquite, school officials were boasting a 73 percent passing rate for all three test sections, an increase of 13 points, nearly twice the state's average rate of improvement of 7 points.

"We would like to say this improvement came from one dramatic strategy, but across the district, we make improvements every day in a thousand ways," said Superintendent John Horn. "If I had to point out one dramatic strategy, it would be the campus improvement plan in which the campus staff sets goals and does strategic planning to achieve those goals."

Garland school officials said they were pleased that five of the district's six high schools had average scores in the 90s on portions of the test. Seventy-six percent of Garland's students passed all sections of the test, compared with 73 percent last year.

"We concentrated on making sure that our minority students used different strategies in learning," said Michael Strozski, the district's director for research and evaluation. "We especially looked for ways to make math more relevant."

The Fort Worth school district also continued to show improvement in all areas of the test, said Dr. C. Neil Shaw, the district's director of research and evaluation.

"This was supposed to be the year for math, and I think around the state it was," said Dr. Shaw. "But we've made more progress in reading than we did in math. . . . Everybody is focusing on reading everywhere we go in the district, and it seems to be paying off."

Dr. Shaw said officials are particularly pleased with improvement in scores among economically disadvantaged students.

Dr. Whit Johnstone, the Irving school district's director of planning, evaluation and research, said officials there are pleased that 70 percent of students passed all the tests.

"That's a key indicator," he said. "They have to pass all tests to graduate."

Grand Prairie district officials said they are happy with their test results but are still looking to make better scores next year.

"We're pleased," said Dr. Mark Jackson, executive director of that district's planning, evaluation and information services. "But we always believe we can



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improve."

Highland Park High School sophomores received the highest scores they have received in recent years on the TAAS.

Ninety-nine percent of the students passed in the reading and writing tests, and 96 percent in math, the highest scores in four years, district officials said.

Sophomore scores in the Hurst-Euless-Bedford school district jumped to 81 percent overall, up from 73 percent last year. The biggest jump came on the math section of the test, which increased from 77 percent last year to 84 percent.

"I think that everybody takes these tests very seriously," said Madeline Taylor, director of counseling and testing for the district. "Teachers, students, and parents all know it is a real high stake for the kids."

Staff writers Kendall Anderson, Liz Cardenas, Joy Dickinson, Dianna Hunt and Laurie Wilson contributed to this report.

GRAPHIC: CHART(S): (DMN) TAAS Results.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: May 10, 1997



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LEVEL 1 - 34 OF 345 STORIES

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THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

April 23, 1997, Wednesday, ARLINGTON MORNING NEWS EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 1A

LENGTH: 913 words

HEADLINE: Four schools post higher TAAS;
Lamar shows;
drop in reading portion

BYLINE: Tracey-Lynn Clough, Staff Writer of the Arlington Morning News

BODY:

The percentage of sophomores passing each component of this year's state-mandated TAAS test improved at all but one of Arlington's five high schools.

In the reading portion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test, Lamar High School scored lower than in 1996. The percentage of Lamar sophomores who passed the category declined slightly, to 87 percent this year compared with 89 percent in 1996.

Arlington High School posted the biggest improvement in any of the exam's three academic categories, according to figures released Tuesday by the school district. Seventy-three percent of Arlington High sophomores passed the math portion, a sharp rise from the 64 percent who passed last year.

"We're not pleased with it," said Lamar Principal Jimmy Jones of the lower reading scores. He added that his school concentrated its efforts on improving previously disappointing math scores.

Lamar High's passing rate in the writing portion of the TAAS test remained at 87 percent, the same as last year.

"Our most concentrated efforts were in mathematics," Mr. Jones said. "To be honest, we coasted in what we were doing the year before in our reading and writing programs."

Lamar High's emphasis on math appeared to pay off. Eighty percent of students passed the math component, up from 73 percent in 1996.

Although the school missed its goal of reaching a 90 percent passing rate in reading and writing, the figures show Lamar High is on the right track, Mr. Jones said.

An equal emphasis will be placed on each of the three components for next year's exam, he said.

Arlington High sophomores passed the reading and writing portions at 88



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percent and 87 percent, respectively, a gain of 5 percentage points in each component over 1996.

Arlington High Principal James Adams said he was pleased by his school's performance.

"I'm glad we've made some improvements," he said.

He added that Arlington High will work toward even higher scores in 1998.

"There's no question there is room for improvement," Mr. Adams said. "We are preparing campus goals, and part of those will be to continue to improve those scores."

Overall, 3,189 Arlington sophomores in February took the exam, which students must pass to go to college. Eighty-seven percent of district sophomores who took the test passed the reading section, 75 percent passed in math, and 87 percent passed the writing portion.

Those percentages are up from 1996, when 85 percent passed reading, 70 percent passed math, and 86 percent passed writing.

Statewide, TAAS passing rates improved, with 86 percent passing reading, 72 percent passing math and 88 percent passing the writing portion, according to preliminary figures released Monday by the Texas Education Agency.

"We're delighted with what they were able to accomplish," Superintendent Lynn Hale said Tuesday. "We're very pleased with the progress. It shows great growth."

Trustee John McInnis said the good showing compares well with the statewide results.

"We're keeping up and getting ahead," Mr. McInnis said. "How can you not feel good about the results."

TEA spokeswoman DeEtta Culbertson said the statewide results show that students are "getting more of the basics in the classroom."

However, while sophomore scores increased over last year, 7 percent of Texas seniors have not yet passed the reading, writing and math portions, according to state figures.

Seniors who failed to pass a portion of the TAAS exam will get another chance during testing Tuesday, said Ms. Culbertson. The TEA will not release final figures until June, she said.

The recently released figures will not impact Arlington's rating by the TEA as an academically acceptable school district.

Of the state's 1,044 school districts, 37 are rated exemplary, 208 are rated recognized, 786 are deemed academically acceptable, and 13 are rated academically unacceptable, Ms. Culbertson said.

Ratings are based on the percentage of students in varying ethnic groups who



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pass the TAAS test, as well as attendance and drop-out rates.

Mrs. Hale said attendance and drop-out rates for Arlington students will not be released until the close of the school year in May.

Arlington school officials say they will aggressively seek to improve the district's rating to exemplary by 2000.

"We need to move heaven and Earth to make it happen," Mr. McInnis said. "We need to be single-minded in our goal because we have only a short three years to accomplish an exemplary rating."

The district has developed incentive programs to help students achieve higher scores on TAAS exam. One offers money to campuses that improve their rankings.

Depending on the level of improvement, campuses may receive \$ 5,000 to \$ 20,000 in additional funds for enrichment programs to assist students with the TAAS.

Those efforts are beginning to work, some trustees said.

"We expect the figures to go up, and the kids keep proving us right," said trustee Barbara Nash. "They're making improvements, and that is the most important thing."

However, school ratings will not be reviewed until the TEA tabulates the results of TAAS exams that will be administered to third- through eighth-grade students next week.

Texas elementary and junior high students will take the math portion of the exam Tuesday and the reading portion April 30. No writing portion is administered to those students, Ms. Culbertson said.

She said results probably won't be available until August.

GRAPHIC: CHART(S): (AMN) TAAS results.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: May 7, 1997



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Austin American-Statesman

April 22, 1997

SECTION: Metro/State; Pg. B2

LENGTH: 651 words

HEADLINE: TAAS scores up 7 percent statewide; Early results show improvement

BYLINE: JODI BERLS AND KEVIN WISHARD

BODY:

Texas high school sophomores, including many in Central Texas, continued to improve scores on the test they all must pass to graduate -- the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills -- preliminary figures released Monday showed.

Statewide, 67 percent of the 10th graders taking the high school-level exam passed all three sections of the test given in February, according to the Texas Education Agency. That's an increase of 7 percent over last year.

Minority students showed slightly stronger gains but continued to lag significantly behind whites in overall scores: Among African American students, 48 percent passed the test, up from 38 percent last year; Hispanic students gained 8 percent to a 52 percent passing rate; white student scores rose 7 percent to 81 percent passing, according to the Texas Education Agency.

Preliminary results of the exit test come as students at elementaries, middle schools and high schools prepare to take the TAAS next week -- scores that will be used to calculate overall accountability ratings in all districts in August.

In the Austin district, all 10 high schools showed improvement in scores on the math portion of the TAAS, with some making double-digit gains. Tenth-grade students at McCallum High School went from an average score of 67 percent passing to 80 percent.

We think it's time to celebrate," said Superintendent Jim Fox.

Officials in many districts surrounding Austin said they are preparing for next week's TAAS and haven't analyzed the preliminary results from February's test. Still, most knew their overall performance.

Round Rock officials said 84 percent of the district's sophomores not enrolled in special education classes passed the exit exam. That was an increase of 7 percent over 1996 results, said Zena Trcka, assessment coordinator.

Westwood High School led the way, with 99 percent passing the reading and writing tests and 93 percent passing math.

Linda Watkins, Westwood's principal, said teachers set high expectations and are demanding of students.



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We do get good students from our feeder schools, but some of them haven't passed their tests (as eighth-graders), so there is work to do."

Preliminary results show San Marcos sophomores are hitting higher marks than last year's class, said Bea Flores, an assistant superintendent for the San Marcos school district. Scores in reading and math were up, and writing scores matched the 90 percent passing rate of the year before.

Flores said the class's overall passing rate was 61 percent.

In Bastrop, the passing rate on math tests shot from 53 percent to 80 percent. In writing, 95 percent passed compared with 81 percent the previous year.

Betty Richardson, director of academic programs for Bastrop's school district, said passing rates among black students showed dramatic improvements but remain below the district's goals. Half of the 24 black sophomores passed this year. In 1996, only one of the 15 sophomores tested passed.

Bob Phillips, an assistant superintendent for the Georgetown school district, said scores for sophomores were better this year than in 1996. He said reading and writing passing rates were over 90 percent.

The results were particularly good news for Austin, where in recent years nearly all of its high schools have been rated low-performing either for poor test scores or for high dropout rates. After last year's results left 11 schools -- including five high schools -- with the low-performing label, school officials pledged to get all its schools off the list in 1997.

The district announced early in the year that preliminary numbers indicate no high schools will be rated low-performing for dropout rates.

We expect to have absolutely no schools on the low-performing list," said Deputy Superintendent Kay Psencik.

LOAD-DATE: April 22, 1997



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Associated Press

04-18 1:30a

Hartford High students confused about how state takeover affects them

By NICOLE SCHIAVI
Associated Press Writer

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) - The newest course offering at embattled Hartford High School is State Takeover 101, and students had plenty of questions.

The Connecticut General Assembly approved the takeover of Hartford schools Wednesday, dissolving Hartford's school board June 1, and giving a panel of state-appointed trustees control over the district's finances.

On Thursday, House Speaker Tom Ritter held an assembly with the 1,670 students to explain what they can expect.

"We're not going to let adults mess up your life," said Ritter, D-Hartford. "The adults that let you down were politicians. The adults that stood up for you were your teachers."

Hartford is the first Connecticut community forced to give up full control of its 23 schools and 24,000 students to the state for the next three years.

Poor academics, high dropout rates and the state's worst test scores were compounded by an accreditation board's recent vote to revoke the Hartford High School's accreditation, and fueled support for the takeover.

Ritter was bombarded with questions

and opinions from his young audience. Student views ranged from outright indignation to an attitude of good riddance to the Hartford Board of Education.

He defended the state's decision, telling the students that the takeover is in their best interest and that the local school board's performance was a sham that needed to be stopped.

He told students that the purpose of the state takeover is to save the schools from losing accreditation, but he warned they should expect bad news before things start to improve.

The students seemed to have a hard time digesting and separating the two main issues at hand: the state takeover and the impending loss of accreditation.

Students also asked Ritter why the state offered money to keep the Hartford Whalers hockey team in town before giving money to the schools.

The takeover bill makes Hartford Public High School eligible for \$20.5 million in state money for construction.

"The governor really doesn't care about our education," freshman Dwyane Pitts said. "(The takeover) made a lot of us happy, but I'm upset because the government felt it could give \$20 million

to (the Whalers) first."

Freshman Wilfredo Ruiz supported the state takeover.

"I think its good because the (Hartford) Board of Education wasn't doing nothing," said Wilfredo Ruiz, a freshman.

Senior Chris Wyatt partly agreed, faulting the school board for not getting enough money to fix the problems at the school, which is losing its accreditation. But Wyatt is strongly opposed to the state takeover, and he defended the teachers and staff.

"We don't need the state to come in and take over the school," Wyatt said. "We work just as hard as any other students."

Students also rallied behind Principal Amado Cruz, voicing strong opposition to the governor's call for his transfer. One student drew wild applause when he yelled out, "If Mr. Cruz go, we all go."

Ritter did not say whether he supported the governor's statement, which was made Wednesday. The students were told that sometimes situations need to be defused and such episodes put behind.

Cruz said after the assembly he is confident he has Ritter's support. ■

USA Today

April 18, 1997

Texas city ahead of the class in school standards

By John Ritter
USA TODAY

Wynn Seale's kids come from the city's most gang-infested neighborhoods, so poor that 95% of the kids qualify for free or subsidized school lunches.

Stem discipline helped turn around this knot of low expectations. But the real key to better performance was a single-minded focus on establishing tough academic standards, a focus that has made this south Texas port city virtually without equal nationwide.

"Standards took the mystery out of

learning," says Wynn Seale principal Richard Peltz. "Our kids know exactly what's expected of them. And they know we expect a lot. There aren't any more excuses."

The hue and cry for higher standards has gained momentum in the last decade behind corporate leaders, education reformers and politicians, including President Clinton. But the pace of school reform and the move to curriculums based on standards have been slow.

Supporters say tough standards are a way to inject consistency and

competitiveness into American schools at a time when students change schools often, when the nation's employers knock schools for turning out unemployable graduates and when U.S. students' test scores trail those of Asian and European students.

Yet, not many schools have tough standards, and even fewer enforce them. Standards are a highly charged issue for school boards and state legislatures. Conservatives often object that the government is trying to dictate what should be taught. Liberals worry about

how poor kids, minorities and immigrants will fare when the academic bar is raised.

Little progress nationwide

The public seems to have no appetite for national standards. A Bush administration proposal to set national standards bombed. President Clinton is trying to jawbone the states, but progress is fitful. Of standards that do exist - state or local - few are world-class.

Corpus Christi, however, stands out as an example of what can be done when there is the will to do it. No large school district has pushed the envelope the way this city has. It has set standards for what its 42,000 students should know and be able to do in every subject in every grade - from dates, facts, trends and concepts to problem-solving, experimentation and essay-writing. And it demands that teachers teach them and students learn them.

As simple as that sounds - as fashionable as it sounds - it's not happening to the degree that education reformers say it should if the nation's schools are to rise above mediocrity.

"What we still see is that it's going to take more than just talk to arrive at high-quality standards," says Matt Gandel, director of education issues for the American Federation of Teachers.

The teachers union, behind its late president Albert Shanker, has long pushed for tougher standards, and it keeps track of progress. Its annual review last year found that only 15 states have standards in math, English, science and social studies "that are clear, specific and well-grounded in content."

Two states - Iowa and Wyoming - have no standards at all. In 12 states, standards in all four core subjects fail to meet the teachers-union criteria. The remaining 21 states and the District of Columbia have standards that fail in one, two or three subjects.

And many standards simply don't measure up because they're too vague, wordy or all-inclusive to be useful as practical learning guides.

An example, from Oregon, that falls short: Students are required to "demonstrate the ability to think critically and creatively in solving problems." And one from Corpus Christi that measures up: "Analyze the development of individual rights in the United States from 1865-present."

Texas' standards meet teachers-union criteria in all four subjects, and students from grade three on take state English

and math tests annually. But students don't have to pass the tests to be promoted. And although students must pass a high school exit exam to graduate, it is based in part on eighth-grade, not 12th-grade, standards.

Most states that have set standards, rigorous or not, don't take the critical extra step of requiring students to pass tests based on them. So there's no guarantee schools will use the standards. Corpus Christi's standards not only are more rigorous than Texas', but students have to master them to graduate.

Pushing for change

So how is it that this oil and petrochemical hub, the nation's sixth-busiest port, a middle-sized city with a Hispanic majority, has moved to the forefront of the academic standards movement?

Employers were complaining that high school graduates lacked basic skills. More than half the graduates who enrolled in a community college were taking at least one remedial class. "Basically there was no consistency in what was being taught," says Sandra Lanier-Lerma, assistant superintendent for instruction.

"I have five Biology I (one) teachers," says King High School principal Sherry Blackett. "There was no way to be sure that students got the same amount of instruction in the most important things."

The realization touched off a two-year crusade that brought together parents, teachers and experts. The final product: Real World Academic Standards - 50 pages of the stuff students must know and how they are to show they know it, from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade.

King and 22 other schools tested the standards in 1995-96. All 61 schools adopted them this school year, and every student was immediately accountable.

"Last year no one really liked them," says junior Morgan Switzer, 17. "This year it's a lot easier."

"You study for the performance standards, you learn the information to pass them and then you retain the knowledge much longer than if you had just crammed for an exam."

Senior Hillary Towers, 18, says, "You know exactly what you're supposed to be learning, and you know you have to learn it by the end of the year. You're prepared for it."

Some high school parents balked when their children failed to master standards and lost sports and

extracurricular eligibility under Texas' no pass, no play rule.

"We told them student achievement is non-negotiable," Blackett says.

To the surprise of many, the district's overall course failure rate is down slightly this year. The presumption had been that more students would struggle under tougher standards. "Kids will rise to the expectations you set for them," Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra says.

But Corpus Christi's transition was helped by other elements of its standards initiative that experts say are crucial to success:

A discipline code, which stripped away disruptions to learning. Anything that smacks of gang influence - certain caps and jewelry, untucked T-shirts with baggy pants - is banned. Regular testing that determines whether the standards are being taught. Students must show their mastery of standards as they learn them. Grades don't hinge on one big final exam. Programs that kick in quickly to help students who are falling behind - before-school and after-school tutoring, Saturday classes and "clustering" students who are struggling with the same standards. Summer school was restructured so students go just long enough to pass standards they had failed. A ban on "social promotion," allowing students to advance from grade to grade whether they pass. "On the social promotion issue, few if any places match up to Corpus Christi," says Gandel of the teachers union.

Outlawing social promotion may be the best insurance that standards are met, but few districts have the stomach for it. Some experts think the emotional distress children suffer when they're held back is worse than the academic repercussions of promoting kids who fail.

They don't buy that in Corpus Christi, although the real test of the policy won't come till the end of this school year, when for the first time students could be held back for failing standards. Linda Bridges, president of the teachers union local, says teachers are anxious to see whether the district follows through.

Saavedra says: "We're not going to socially promote."

Taking the next steps

Across the district, there's a level of cooperation that outsiders say is rare in an education bureaucracy. A key to success is that teachers had a central role in drafting the standards.

As a result, Corpus Christi has moved on to issues that aren't even on the radar

screens of most other districts. Grading, for example. It became apparent that the best set of standards could fall prey to the grading quirks of teachers. Corpus Christi is now experimenting with scoring criteria for every standard.

Teachers also are shifting to more active and hands-on learning. A buzzword districtwide is "products" - charts, portfolios, displays, demonstrations, research - that students create, often in teams, as they learn. Students are more motivated.

Corpus Christi is trying to incorporate more reading, writing and math into the other subjects. Until high school, you don't take English, you take "language arts," a combination of reading, writing, speaking and listening. A reading course is required for all high school freshmen.

Teachers find that some textbooks no longer measure up to Corpus Christi standards, and that has put a premium on finding other resources. Now it's not just social studies teachers requesting maps for classrooms; language arts and science teachers want them, too.

Math gets a huge push. A goal is that all students pass algebra by eighth grade. Computation takes a back seat to

problem-solving. "If students can verbalize about math, they retain it longer," algebra teacher Jerrie Barker says. "What we had been doing was not working."

The district has no meaningful data yet to prove that tougher standards are raising performance. And it may not have any for a few years, because standards are not a quick-fix. Lanier-Lerma is quick to point out that some schools, and some principals, lag behind others.

But anecdotal evidence is encouraging. Test scores seem to be heading up. Blackett says some of last year's King High graduates who resisted standards the most have come back to tell her they were wrong, that they benefited from a single year of higher expectations.

Most teachers are believers. "Before, you closed your door and you didn't want anyone to know what you were doing," says Ann Rall, a seventh-grade language arts teacher. "Teachers used to keep their successes to themselves. Now we want to share our successes."

In just two years, standards clearly are driving public education here. They dominate school meetings. Banners and

posters everywhere preach standards. Teachers laminate them and post them in classrooms. Students know what they have to master and when. Parents are becoming familiar with them.

"We're after higher-order thinking skills," says Wynn Seale principal Peltz. "We're used to hearing teachers say, 'Tell me, listen, restate.' Now we're hearing 'Evaluate, create, defend, justify, give reasons.'"

Peltz and his teachers have made a lot of progress with Wynn Seale's at-risk student population. But he thinks taking them to the next level, the district's goal of 90% passing state tests, will be much harder. "Anyone can take a school to 60% or 70%," he says. "The research says we're going to plateau next year, and the kids will slip."

"So we'll try more radical strategies. Maybe extend the day, regroup children every other day. Teach, assess and regroup. The paradigm is going to have to be broken by the parents. Maybe the parents of underachievers will have to come to school once a week, learn how to help their kids with homework."

"We'll have to be more radical." ■

Minneapolis Star Tribune

April 18, 1997

Pennsylvania campus tames some of Minnesota's toughest kids

Star Tribune

CONCORDVILLE, PA. — As the remains of a snowstorm melted into a spring morning, Duane Nelson gazed at the lush grass, the stately brick buildings and the grand stone library. And, smiling into the sun, he basked in the hope of redemption.

The 18-year-old gang member from the Minneapolis area was forced to come here, to Glen Mills Schools, for severely beating another young man. Staring at a four-year sentence in adult prison if he messes up again, Nelson sees this pretty but tough-talking private school for delinquent boys as his last chance to bloom.

"I am lucky to be here," he said. "I am very lucky to be here."

This week, key leaders in Minnesota

are trying to ensure that kids such as Nelson don't have to travel 2,000 miles from home to get that chance.

There is no place like Glen Mills in Minnesota. A state that prides itself on an abundance of programs for society's ills sends hundreds of its toughest and most violent juveniles to out-of-state facilities at a cost of about \$5 million each year.

That's not to say Minnesota has no place to keep kids who set fires, steal cars or rape people. But state and local officials acknowledge that it's a hodgepodge of a system. It locks up a few kids, tries to treat many and casts others adrift. And nobody knows whether any of it works.

One study showed that 90 percent of kids sent to the "reform schools" at Red

Wing and Sauk Centre committed new crimes within five years — numbers that alarm parents and communities as they watch delinquent juveniles turn into dangerous adults.

Like other states, Minnesota has long focused on locking up more adults for more years. This year, the Legislature is taking a closer look at the places we send young criminals.

The proposals range from boot camps for first- and second-time offenders to transforming Red Wing or Sauk Centre into a place that would reform even the worst — a place like Glen Mills.

Praised for its educational and vocational programs, yet knocked for its reliance on discipline over soul-searching, Glen Mills has inspired

LEVEL 1 - 73 OF 345 STORIES

Copyright 1997 Times Publishing Company
St. Petersburg Times

February 25, 1997, Tuesday

SECTION: HERNANDO TIMES; Pg. 1

DISTRIBUTION: HERNANDO TIMES

LENGTH: 648 words

HEADLINE: County's college prep scores rise

BYLINE: ERIC WOODMAN

BODY:

In two years, graduates of Hernando County's public high schools have gone from being the least prepared for college in the Tampa Bay area to among the best, according to the results of a test given to freshmen at Florida's public colleges and universities.

And for the first time, students who attended Hernando schools performed better than the statewide average.

"Any time you can improve your test scores you have to be pleased," Superintendent John Sanders said. "I don't think this represents any sort of change on our part. We have various people who work hard. Our goal is to get better every year."

As the state average has dropped, the percentage of students from Hernando who passed the test has risen for several years. The test measures new college students' aptitude in three areas: math, writing and reading.

The test, given last fall, showed that 59.1 percent of college freshmen who graduated from Hernando high schools were prepared for college work in all three areas. The state average was 54.1 percent.

Students who fail an area of the test are given remedial classes at their college.

Among Hernando's three high schools, Hernando High in Brooksville did the best job of preparing its college-bound students. Seventy-one percent of Hernando High graduates passed the test, compared with 58.1 percent for Central High, west of Brooksville, and 54.4 percent for Springstead High in Spring Hill.

Springstead's scores were weighted down by just 50.4 percent passing the writing part of the test, versus 80.7 percent at Hernando High and 76.8 percent at Central.



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Because only students attending Florida public colleges and universities take the test, Sanders warned against assuming that one school is providing a better or worse education.

"There are a lot of factors to consider," he said. "We don't even know who is taking the test. Some of our best students may be going (to college) out of state."

Taylor Culler, educational policy analyst with the Florida Department of Education, said that although results can be deceiving, the overall picture for Hernando is good.

"Scores in the state have dropped for five years in a row, and they've been going up in Hernando County," he said. "That's something people there should be proud of."

In the past three years, the percentage of Hernando graduates passing the test has gone from 51.1 percent to 54.4 percent to 59.1 percent.

As with the rest of the state's districts, students entering community colleges were less prepared for college than students going to four-year schools.

Just 43.3 percent of the community college students from Hernando County passed all three areas of the test, compared with 96 percent of those going to four-year colleges or universities.

Statewide, 37.1 percent were ready in community colleges and 91.5 percent were prepared for four-year schools.

Test grades show improvement

Nearly 300 Hernando County high school graduates took the readiness-for-college test this year at one of Florida's public universities, colleges or community colleges. For the first time, Hernando's students finished above the state average. Numbers indicate the percentage of students who passed each area of the test. The "overall" category reflects the percentage of students who passed math, writing and reading.

	Math	Writing	Reading	Overall
Central High	69.5%	76.8%	85.4%	58.1%
Hernando High	84.3%	80.7%	89.2%	71.1%
Springstead High	69.9%	58.4%	73.7%	54.4%
Hernando district	73.8%	74.2%	81.2%	59.1%
State averages	68.5%	72.0%	75.8%	54.1%

Source: Florida Department of Education

GRAPHIC: COLOR CHART; Chart listing test results for the readiness-for-college test for students at Central High, Hernando High, Springstead High, the



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Hernando district and state averages, includes a pencil writing "A, B, C."

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: February 26, 1997



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LEVEL 1 - 80 OF 345 STORIES

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February 13, 1997, Thursday KY:KENTUCKY

SECTION: NEWS Pg.01B

LENGTH: 760 words

HEADLINE: Schools to share \$ 27.7 million in KERA rewards

BYLINE: GIL LAWSON, The Courier-Journal

SOURCE: STAFF

DATELINE: FRANKFORT, Ky.

BODY:

A check is in the mail to 533 Kentucky schools as part of the state's reward system for improved test scores.

The Department of Education announced yesterday the schools will share \$ 27.7 million this year, the second time reward money has been distributed.

The rewards will range from \$ 1,155 to \$ 2,310 for each teacher at those schools, depending upon the level of improvement.

Under Kentucky's school accountability system, schools that exceed their goals on tests are eligible for cash rewards every two years. The test results determine the amount of the reward. Teachers, counselors, librarians and principals can vote to decide what to do with the money.

Two years ago some schools voted to share money with other employees such as janitors and cooks, some set aside money for scholarships and others used it for school projects. In a handful of districts the method used to hand out the money was challenged in lawsuits by teachers who had left the school, but none of the challenges has been successful.

The expectation of receiving the reward money "hasn't posed a problem yet" for the staff at Wellington Elementary in Jefferson County, said Principal Verna Cahoon. A committee of teachers was assigned to come up with options on what to do with the \$ 44,732 the school will get.

Teachers at Slaughter Elementary, another of the 41 Jefferson County schools receiving rewards, have been busy preparing students for this year's test, which will start in April, and haven't decided what they'll do with the money, Principal Eugene Kelly said. "We can't let this go to our heads," he said.

He also plans to have a committee consider options for dividing the \$ 39,047.

When the test scores were released last October, the state said 502 schools



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would share in rewards. But adjustments and corrections made in the scores have added to the total, Department of Education spokeswoman Lisa York Gross said.

Also sharing in the money will be 35 central offices for districts that were placed in the reward category.

The amount of money for each teacher is down from two years ago because more schools and teachers qualified for the rewards. Last year, 14,126 people qualified to share \$ 26.1 million and the reward amount ranged between \$ 1, 301 and \$ 2,602 for each teacher. This year the money is being divided among 16,074 people. The amounts could differ depending on what the teachers and schools decide to do with the money.

The state has set aside \$ 506,497 because 43 schools are appealing their test scores to the state Board of Education. Some of those schools, which have hearings scheduled in the next few weeks, could qualify for reward money if their appeal is successful.

Any leftover money will be held until the next reward payment in two years.

The reward money is part of an accountability system established by the Kentucky Education Reform Act. Schools are held accountable, based on the test scores, and can get rewards or face sanctions.

Some critics contend the reward system is flawed because the **test** and the way **improvement** is measured isn't reliable. Others think that reward money should not be used as an incentive.

A recent survey by the Kentucky Institute for Education Research showed a split between educators and the general public when they were asked whether rewards and sanctions were necessary to **improve school** performance.

Just over a third of the principals and teachers agreed rewards and sanctions were necessary; more than 80 percent of public school parents and members of the general public agreed.

LANGUAGE: English

LOAD-DATE: February 14, 1997



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THE HARTFORD COURANT

January 14, 1997 Tuesday, 2 WEST CENTRAL

SECTION: TOWN NEWS; Pg. B1

LENGTH: 419 words

HEADLINE: PLAINVILLE STUDENTS' TEST SCORES GO UP IN MOST AREAS

BYLINE: FRAN SILVERMAN; Courant Staff Writer

DATELINE: PLAINVILLE --

BODY:

Students in fourth, sixth and eighth grade showed marked **improvement** on the Connecticut Mastery Tests, with scores rising in almost all categories and across the grade levels.

The results of the exam, released by **school** officials Monday, showed that the scores were **improving** among the same group of students who took the **test** as fourth-graders, then as sixth- and eighth-graders. The **test** results also showed the percentage of students in fourth and sixth grades scoring at or above state goals increased in all areas of the **test** since it was first given in 1993.

The mastery test measures the proficiency of fourth-, sixth- and eighth-graders in reading, writing and mathematics. Its goal is to establish high educational standards and ensure that students can apply their academic skills to realistic, everyday problems.

The most significant increase came in writing. In 1993, 36 percent of fourth-graders reached the state goal; in 1996, 51 percent did. In 1993, 47 percent of all sixth-graders scored at or above the state goal, while in 1996, that rose to 60 percent. Eighth-grade scores also rose, with 33 percent of students meeting or exceeding the state goal in 1993, and 66 percent doing so in 1996.

In reading, the number of students in fourth-grade scoring at or above the state reading goal increased from 54 percent in 1993 to 59 percent in 1996; in sixth grade, 58 percent scored at or above the state goal in 1993, compared with 66 percent in 1996; and in eighth grade, 53 percent hit the state goal in 1993, compared with 57 percent in 1996.

In math, fourth-grade scores also rose. In 1993, 49 percent scored at or above the state goal, while in 1996, that had increased to 60 percent. Forty-three percent of sixth- graders scored at or above the goal in 1993; the number jumped to 55 percent in 1996.

But the percentage of eighth- graders who met or exceeded the state goal in mathematics dropped from 55 percent in 1993 to 48 percent in 1996. And mathematics scores dropped among fourth-graders in 1994 who took the test again

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in sixth grade from 61 percent to 55 percent meeting the state goal.
School officials said they'd be examining the results.

"I am just tickled pink in those improvements over time," said Superintendent James P. Ritchie. "In the history of my career, I haven't seen them pop up quite that fast."

"I attribute improvement trends to the focus on literacy in the past five years," Curriculum Director Kathleen Binkowski told the school board.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: January 14, 1997



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January 11, 1997 Saturday, 7 HARTFORD NORTH FINAL

SECTION: METRO HARTFORD; Pg. B3

LENGTH: 500 words

HEADLINE: WINDSOR IMPROVES SCORES ON STATE TEST

BYLINE: MARIE K. SHANAHAN; Courant Staff Writer

DATELINE: WINDSOR --

BODY:

The first results of the school system's push to improve students' writing skills are starting to show.

According to Connecticut Mastery Test scores released this week, the percentage of eighth-graders reaching or exceeding the state goal in writing has more than doubled from 21 percent in 1995 to 43 percent in 1996.

Significant improvements in writing were also made by fourth- grade and sixth-grade students, with an additional 13 percent of fourth-graders and 15 percent of sixth-graders meeting the state goals on the standardized tests in 1996.

"We're very pleased with the results," said Assistant Superintendent of Schools Carol MacMullen. "It shows we were able to create momentum for everyone in the district to focus on writing -- students, teachers, administrators and parents."

The mastery test measures the proficiency of fourth-, sixth- and eighth-graders in reading, writing and mathematics. Its goal is to establish high educational standards and ensure students can apply their academic skills to realistic, everyday problems.

Writing scores were the one area school officials recognized as needing major improvement after test results in 1995 and 1994 showed most town students were lagging, MacMullen said.

After being berated by residents because of the low scores, school staff members developed an action plan for improvement, said school board member Tim Curtis.

"We focused on instruction in writing rather than just making students write," MacMullen said. "We made writing [all teachers'] responsibility. Writing wasn't just for English classes, but for science and math classes, too. It should be used in every area."

MacMullen said the system also developed a way to monitor student writing



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skills by administering quarterly writing exercises similar to those on the mastery test.

Sixth- and eighth-graders are tested in expository and persuasive writing, while fourth-grade students are tested in narrative writing.

"Whatever the staff did obviously worked," Curtis said. "It's very gratifying to see Windsor students moving in the right direction."

Overall, the system improved eight of its nine mastery test scores. The only decline came in fourth- grade mathematics, where 56 percent of students met the state goal, compared with 61 percent in 1995.

This chart shows the percentage of Windsor students scoring at or above the goal in reading, writing and mathematics on the Connecticut Mastery Test for 1996 compared with the town scores in 1995 and the state average for 1995. The state averages for 1996 have not been released.

GRADE 4th 6th 8th

Math

Windsor '96

56 53 52

Ct. Avg. '95

59 48 47

Windsor '95

61 48 49

Reading

Windsor '96

54 61 63

Ct. Avg. '95

48 59 59

Windsor '95

51 60 61

Writing

Windsor '96

54 36 43

Ct. Avg. '95



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46 40 46
Windsor '95

41 21 21

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: January 13, 1997



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LEVEL 1 - 121 OF 345 STORIES

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THE HARTFORD COURANT

January 10, 1997 Friday, 3 ENFIELD NORTH CENTRAL

SECTION: TOWN NEWS; Pg. B1

LENGTH: 497 words

HEADLINE: SOMERS STUDENTS' TEST SCORES RISE;
IMPROVEMENT SEEN IN 8 OF 9 CATEGORIES

BYLINE: DON STACOM; Courant Correspondent

DATELINE: SOMERS --

BODY:

The school district reported widespread **improvement** in scores on the 1996 Connecticut Mastery Test, with an especially strong rise in results on the eighth-grade writing section of the exam.

In eight of nine test categories, students who took the test in the fall did better than those who took it a year earlier.

"This shows a lot of hard work on behalf of the students, the staff and the administration," Superintendent Paul Gagliarducci said Thursday. "We're hoping to use this to raise our base line and go on from there."

Each year, fourth-, sixth- and eighth-graders across the state take the test, which measures skills in reading, writing and mathematics. This year's results showed that roughly two-thirds of Somers students met the state's performance goals in reading and math, with a slightly lower average in writing.

The single most dramatic rise was in eighth-grade writing. In 1994 and again in 1995, only 38 percent of Somers eighth-graders reached the state goal. In 1996, that figure shot up to 71 percent.

As dramatic as that improvement appears, Gagliarducci still recommended that parents and observers not draw too many conclusions from any single test.

In eighth-grade writing, for instance, a large percentage of students who fell below the goal in past years were missing by only one or two points out of the possible 12 that could be scored, Gagliarducci said.

"You really have to take a look at things over a period of years. You can't tell too much from one snapshot," he said.

At the elementary school, teachers are regularly getting time to discuss students' writing skills and performance, Gagliarducci said. That appears to be paying off.

"We're starting to see results and we'll be seeing even more results," he



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said.

Gagliarducci will present a more detailed examination of the mastery test results and a comparison with scores from similar school districts in the state in February.

"At first blush, it looks like it was solid," school board Chairwoman Janice Budington said. "Some areas really looked like we made significant advances in places we were watching."

* Numbers reflect percentage of students meeting state standard:

GRADE 4

1996 1995 1994

Mathematics 77 56 64

Writing 52 48 48

Reading 64 50 49

GRADE 6

1996 1995 1994

Mathematics 62 55 49

Writing 62 52 37

Reading 70 66 79

GRADE 8

1996 1995 1994

Mathematics 69 55 69

Writing 71 38 38

Reading 70 66 79

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: January 10, 1997



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The Capital

December 27, 1996, Friday

SECTION: Annapolis; Pg. A12

LENGTH: 526 words

HEADLINE: Schools improve test scores

BYLINE: By MIMI EUBANK Staff Writer

BODY:

A number of Annapolis teachers, principals and students went home for the holidays with an extra present this year: a shining performance on statewide assessment tests.

Many of Annapolis' seven elementary schools can claim responsibility for comments from state officials that the county school system is one of the fastest-improving school systems in Maryland.

Every Annapolis school showed improvements in some areas of the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program tests. Three elementary schools — West Annapolis, Georgetown East and Rolling Knolls — improved in every subject. Annapolis student accomplishments on the statewide tests, and what they're learning in preparation for them, will go a long way, said Joan Briscoe, principal of West Annapolis.

"MSPAP as an instructional model is a step in the right direction," she said, adding that the tests "set higher expectations for teachers and students."

Eastport third- and fifth-graders scored higher in 11 of the 12 subtests; Germantown and Hillsmere gained in nine of the areas.

Annapolis Elementary School scored higher in six of the subtests, finishing with a school composite score of 37.3, while Tyler Heights improved in seven. That school, however, finished with a low composite score of 26 percent.

Mills-Parole third- and fifth graders received a 32.35 percent composite score, gaining in eight of the subtests.

Annapolis Middle School eighthgraders made gains in four of the six areas, while Bates Middle students scored higher in three of the subtests.

Each year, the MSPAP tests

third-, fifth- and eighth-grade students in six areas: reading, writing, language usage, mathematics, science and social studies.

By the year 2000, schools where at least 70 percent of the students are not scoring satisfactorily in every subtest face a takeover by the state.



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The Capital, December 27, 1996

Many of the Annapolis elementary schools, such as Eastport and West Annapolis, credit better comprehension skills for MSPAP test improvements.

"Eastport has been improving for three years in a row," said James Seamon, principal of Eastport.

Students gain a better understanding in all areas by reading and writing more about whatever they're studying, Mr. Seamon said.

"There are no true or false or multiple choice answers anymore. They must be able to explain themselves," Mr. Seamon said.

"They've certainly received dividends."

Eastport third-graders made improvements in every subtest, finishing with a composite score of 48.25 percent. Fifth-graders scored higher in all but the writing test. Their composite score was 48.5.

Students at West Annapolis are also very close to meeting the 70 percent state standard, prompting the state to single out the school when the state results were released earlier this month.

The third- and fifth-grade composite score at the school was 58.5 percent.

Last year, Hillsmere Elementary School was placed on a countywide list of schools that could be in danger of being taken over by the state.

This year, fifth-graders improved in every area except reading, while third-graders improved in all but reading and social studies.

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Copyright 1997 The News and Observer
The News and Observer (Raleigh, NC)

June 6, 1997 Friday, DURHAM EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. A1

LENGTH: 757 words

HEADLINE: **Test** scores of Durham students rise

BYLINE: KELLY THOMPSON COCHRAN, STAFF WRITER

BODY:

DURHAM -- Most reading, writing and math scores rose again in Durham elementary and middle **schools** this spring, though no other grade levels matched the system's progress on eighth-grade exams released earlier this week.

Preliminary results released Thursday indicate that Durham students in grades three to eight maintained or slightly **improved** their performance on 10 of 14 state **tests** this spring. Math scores **improved** at most grade levels, while reading and writing scores rose in some grades and fell in others.

By far the largest gains came in eighth grade, where a new policy requires that students who fail the state **tests** either attend summer **school** or be held back a year. The district's average reading score increased 1.7 points to 161.1, and its math average jumped 2.2 points to 171.6.

The state's testing system measures all students in grades three to eight on a 100-point scale, and most children generally improve their scores by only four or five points from one grade level to the next. Thus, the eighth-grade improvements represent a major increase.

With the exception of strong math scores at the elementary level, the district's other **improvements** were much smaller. But **school** officials are pleased with the system's cumulative progress during the past five years and predicted that this spring's hard work has laid the foundation for larger gains.

"I am very happy for our teachers and principals, and most of all for the children," Superintendent Ann Denlinger said. "We hope this is the first year of a very sharp upward spiral."

The only major disappointment in the test scores was on the seventh-grade writing exams given in March, which have seesawed in recent years. The number of students passing the exam rose 16 percentage points last spring to 49 percent, but dropped by the same amount this year. As a result, only about a third of Durham students passed the exam.

Administrators said they aren't sure what happened, but pointed out that the state and most other districts' averages dropped as well. On the plus side, Durham's fourth-graders improved their passing rate from 41 percent to nearly 45 percent even as the state average declined to 49 percent.



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"We're not up to the state average yet, but we're closing the gap," testing administrator David Holdzkom said.

Because the state reading and math tests weren't administered until late May, results are still incomplete for most grades. State averages are not yet available, and Durham officials are still double-checking exact counts on how many students passed each exam. They plan to release that information, along with racial breakdowns, next week.

At the middle school level, the district's average tests scores suggested that sixth- and seventh-graders have held their ground this spring after significant improvements in math in previous years. Reading scores also dropped slightly after earlier improvements.

Middle schools director Elsa Woods said she was not sure if the heavy emphasis on meeting the new eighth-grade requirement might have distracted attention from the earlier grades, but she said that several improvements are already under way for 1997-98.

For instance, the system is planning additional training for writing teachers and is working to add literacy specialists who will concentrate on basic reading skills that are not usually covered in the middle-school curriculum. The district also might look at adding extra writing tests between grades four and seven to help students polish their skills.

"We all want to continue the progress," Woods said.

At the elementary level, average math scores jumped significantly this spring, rising by 0.8 in grades three and four and 1.3 points in grade five. School officials said increased emphasis on hands-on activities and materials appears to be paying off.

"We've been doing math training at all grade levels," elementary schools director Gene Chasin said.

Elementary reading scores made relatively little change this year except a 0.6 rise in fifth grade and the larger jump in eighth. But officials expect them to improve rapidly in the next several years as the result of a major new literacy initiative in earlier grades.

Teachers for kindergarten, first grade and second grade have received intensive training over the past nine months on how to boost reading skills, but their students are so young that the state does not test them. The school system's goal is that 95 percent of third-graders will pass state reading tests by the year 2000.

GRAPHIC: graphic; Durham 1996-97 test scores; Staff

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: June 6, 1997



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The Morning Call (Allentown)

May 23, 1997, Friday, FOURTH EDITION

SECTION: BETHLEHEM, Pg. B4

LENGTH: 278 words

HEADLINE: NORTHAMPTON STANDARDIZED **TEST** SCORES **IMPROVE**;
* **SCHOOL** DISTRICT EMPHASIZED IMPORTANCE OF STUDENT PREPARATION.

BYLINE: KATHLEEN PARRISH; The Morning Call

BODY:

Standardized **test** scores of Northampton students **improved** this year because the district placed more emphasis on preparing for and taking the **test**, according to interim Superintendent Thomas Persing.

"The quality increase in academic performance will continue to happen if we all emphasize its importance," he said.

The largest improvement was made in the seventh grade, where 67 percent of the class scored above the national average on the California Test of Basic Skills, up from 57 percent last year.

In ninth grade, 65 percent of the students scored above the national average, compared to 62 percent last year. And in 10th grade, 69 percent of the students exceeded national figures, up from 66 percent.

The test covers study skills, science, social studies, reading, language and math. At the direction of the school board, more emphasis was placed on **improving** standardized **test** scores this year, said junior high Principal Roger Washburn.

The first thing the schools did was to stress the importance of the three-day tests to students and parents, Washburn said.

The schools served free breakfast and students were allowed to go home after completing each day's test.

"The kids had to focus only on the testing for three days," said senior high Principal Frank Kovacs. "They didn't need to be worried about studying for an exam later in the afternoon."

Calculators also were supplied and only one standardized test was given this year to a grade level, Washburn said.

"In past years, we gave more than one test and we felt there was a burnout effect," he said.

Pennsylvania assessment test scores will be released in the fall.



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LEVEL 1 - 10 OF 345 STORIES

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May 23, 1997 Friday, NORTH SPORTS FINAL EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 1; ZONE: N

LENGTH: 899 words

HEADLINE: **TEST SCORES SOAR AT CITY SCHOOLS ON PROBATION;
NUMBERS UP, BUT STILL BELOW NATIONAL NORM**

BYLINE: By Janita Poe, Tribune Education Writer.

BODY:

Last fall when Chicago Public **Schools** chief Paul Vallas placed more than 100 **schools** on academic probation, many students and officials expressed embarrassment--even anger--that their **schools** were being singled out for the bureaucratic equivalent of a trip to the principal's office.

Now, with the release Thursday of scores on the Iowa **Tests** of Basic Skills for Grades 3 through 8 showing marked **improvement** in many **schools** on probation, officials at some of those **schools** say it was that very attention and pressure that seems to have gotten results.

Whether the slew of probation managers, external partners and other visits by the central administration produced tangible changes in instruction remains debatable. But one thing seems indisputable: Probation delivered a psychological punch.

"What these scores tell me is that probation is working," Vallas said.

Of the 71 elementary **schools** on probation, 54 **improved** in reading and 69 in math, according to preliminary reports on the test scores. On Thursday, officials said 22 of those schools are now eligible to be removed from the designation.

Overall, 393 of the city's 473 elementary **schools** **tested improved** in math and 271 had higher scores in reading than the previous year. Schools doubling their test scores in at least one of the subjects included Beidler, McNair, Carver Middle and Morse.

School administrators plan a news conference to discuss the scores at 10:30 a.m. Friday at the Parkman School.

Pat Harvey, the schools' accountability chief, said she was encouraged by the scores because of gains made by the poorest performing students.

"The lowest performing students are getting better, and so are the two groups next to them," said Harvey. ". . . I think the message is that all kids, regardless of where they are born, regardless of their station in life or their race, can achieve."



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The release of the preliminary data--a small percentage of makeup tests were not included--was being pointed to by Vallas' allies as proof that the new management team for schools is succeeding. Earlier this month, school leaders announced even greater gains in high school students' scores on the Test of Achievement and Proficiency.

But some school-reform leaders say the scores are indicative of improvements implemented over the last decade, not any recent revamping.

"There's been a trend of improvement over the last seven years, and we're pleased to see that trend is continuing," said Donald Moore, executive director of Designs for Change, an educational research and reform group.

"I think principal leadership, the involvement of the local school councils and the commitment of teachers to working together have paid off."

Though the overall scores improved, that improvement was not seen uniformly. For instance, pupils at or above national norms in reading comprehension declined slightly for the system's 3rd, 6th and 8th grades.

And scores of 30.1 percent in reading and 35.6 percent in math mean that the vast majority of students were below national norms.

For schools on probation, the improved scores were a reason to rejoice.

Geraldine Moore, principal of Beidler in the Garfield Park neighborhood on the West Side, said her staff initially was "devastated" about being placed on probation. But the status also was a "wake-up call" to improve standards at the school, she said.

"We wanted to know 'Why, what had we done wrong?' " said Moore, a former parent aide who has been principal of the school since 1994. "But what we did was to turn it into a reaffirmation. We looked at our weaknesses and set out to improve them."

The work apparently paid off: Reading scores at Beidler more than tripled--from 10.2 in 1996 to 33.3 in 1997--and those in math rose from 24.8 to 36.3 during that same period.

Moore said the renewed commitment spilled over to the five-member probation management team, set up in October and headed by West Side education legend Marva Collins. The team implemented many of Collins' methods--including a focus on phonics and repetition--and also began following her lead on student encouragement and regimented daily schedules.

Beidler also was one of 132 schools to set up extended school days this year; the school added two hours of optional math and reading study for four days a week after school. By early winter, Beidler had developed a motto, prominently displayed on the school marquee: "Probation brings opportunity."

Principals at other schools posting improvements also said the probation status forced them to focus on specific problems at their schools.



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Chicago Tribune, May 23, 1997

Albert Gaston, principal at the Fulton School in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, said his school was "already on its course" and did not modify any curriculum, programs or instruction methods. But he said teacher and student motivation increased after the school went on probation.

Though the overall scores improved, that improvement was not seen uniformly. For instance, pupils at or above national norms in reading comprehension declined slightly for the system's 3rd, 6th and 8th grades.

Vallas and other officials said they hope to make even more significant **improvements on testing** in the next few years. The increases made by the probation schools, they said, prove any school can succeed if goals and priorities are set for them.

GRAPHIC: PHOTOS 2 GRAPHICPHOTO: Beidler Elementary School Principal Geraldine Moore gets a hug from 3rd grader Lawrence Barron.; PHOTO: Two Beidler Elementary School 3rd graders enthusiastically compete to answer math questions in class. Tribune photos by Chuck Berman.; GRAPHIC: Citywide **testscores improving.**; - How **test** scores breakdown.; - Scoring at or above the national norm.; Source: Chicago Public Schools.; Chicago Tribune.; See microfilm for complete graphic.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: May 23, 1997



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56. Los Angeles Times

* 05/21/97; Edition: Ventura County Edition; Section: Metro; Zones Desk; Page B-1

Students Now Must Learn the Hard Way; Education: Santa Paula High will dump standard classes and require college prep for everyone.

By REGINA HONG
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

SANTA PAULA — For decades, Santa Paula High School held to their academic hierarchy: one system for the advanced placement and honor students, another for college prep students and a third and by far the largest group in standardized courses, designed to teach just the basics.

Not anymore.

Determined to boost academic performance in a district that has for years landed at the bottom of county test scores and four-year college attendance rates, administrators are eliminating the standard courses next year and pushing the students into the more rigorous college prep courses.

In September, students from the bottom of the academic totem pole can expect to sit next to the straight-A students. Standards will be raised, said Principal Tony Gaitan. "You'll know what it's like to be in a rigorous program. You'll know what it means to be challenged and you'll know what it means to study hard."

Teachers are deeply divided over the plan, worried that the timeline is too quick and that the system will set students up for failure. But the school is already making changes for next year's transition.

The campus recently began holding tutoring/homework periods from 6 to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday. For the first time, administrators will require freshmen to attend summer school if they are behind in math or reading skills. A remedial math and English class will be offered to freshmen who are still below grade level.

Campus administrators have also been consulting with Los Angeles' Garfield High School, made famous by the 1988 movie "Stand and Deliver," about math teacher Jaime Escalante's quest to raise standards. Garfield has a similar student demographic to Santa Paula High, although it moved more slowly, switching over in seven years.

The change next year has some students both excited and nervous.

"I think it's going to be difficult," said freshman Evelyn Martinez. "They're going to be giving us more work and I don't think the teacher will be able to explain it to each of us."

But Evelyn also thinks she'll learn a lot faster.

While the plan is a hotly debated matter on campus, at least one class eliminated standard classes a decade ago. Science teacher Ray Sepulveda's classroom could be a model for the rest of the school.

Here junior Esiquio Delgadillo whips easily through his zoology anatomy exam, identifying parts of a clam, such as the kidney and foot. Esiquio's classmates range from A students to those who read at the third-grade level.

All students in this college prep course must master the same material.

Ten years ago, with permission from the administration and department, Sepulveda eliminated the less challenging standard track course and allowed all students to enroll in the college prep course, which requires additional homework and places greater emphasis on problem-solving skills.

"We've been doing it the way the whole school should be," Sepulveda said.

Esiquio, currently enrolled in all college prep classes, envisions that students from standard classes will benefit from the push.

"I think it's a good idea," Esiquio said. "You'll be able to learn more. There are some people [in standard classes] able to do it, but they just don't want to do it because they're lazy."

At the 1,314-student campus, the honor students typically scooped up top awards in county contests, while the majority of the student body lagged behind. Honor students this year landed first place in the county's Knowledge Bowl, second place in the Geography Bowl and won the \$1,000 Amgen award at the county science fair.

But teachers and parents hungered for a change, something that could boost the performance of the entire student body.

In the mainly blue-collar town, typically 5% to 10% of students enroll in four-year colleges, far below county average. The campus usually is at the bottom of the pack in standardized test scores in the county. Even when compared with other state schools with similar ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, the campus still ranked at the bottom quarter on last year's SAT.

"If we've been the lowest for so long, something needs to change," said school's activities director Lisa Salas, who also graduated from the school.

The change won't be easy.

When school administrators in February announced the decision to drop all standard courses by next year, a number of teachers left the conference room fuming. Others left as if in a state of shock.

It wasn't that they disagreed with raising student standards. Teachers said there just wasn't enough time to implement a plan like this by next school year, and the result could be widespread student failure or the watering down of difficult college prep courses.

The college prep courses require more work than students in standard classes may be accustomed to. For example, students in the freshman standard English course were required to read a literature textbook and one additional novel "To Kill a Mockingbird." The college prep course requires the same textbooks as well as four or five additional novels accompanied by book reports.

"The English department really and truly agrees with the idea that standards need to be raised, but we don't think that by calling [students] all college prep that that's going to change things," said English teacher Jeri Cook.

Students who receive an A in college prep courses next fall will also be encouraged to move up to the advanced placement and honor class, a move that

has teachers worried that the quality of honor classes will be diluted too.

Teachers wonder how a student can catch up with three or four grades worth of reading in a summer or a few tutoring sessions. How does the school prevent a student from falling on his or her face and quitting school, discouraged that the material is suddenly too difficult for them?

How can the quality or pace of a college prep class remain the same if the teacher must take more time for students not used to the more rigorous standards?

"It will be chaotic," Cook said. "Either we dilute our program or a large number of students will fail. If someone's reading at the sixth-grade level, they can't read 'The Crucible', analyze it and write an essay on it. In 11th grade college prep, I already have to teach them about nouns and verbs. I can't imagine what it will be like next year."

Some teachers want the school to move more slowly, starting the first year with the freshmen, then moving up.

Garfield High adopted their plan piecemeal, starting first with math classes and working through the rest of the departments. The Conejo Valley School District also phased out its standard classes over a seven-year period.

But administrators and teachers who support the plan argued that the school should not wait another year while more students slip through the old system.

"I agree with the administrators," Sepulveda said. "Let's do it now. You can talk about it forever, but until you're in the middle of it, you're never going to develop it, not to say there aren't frustrations."

Sepulveda said he understands why

teachers would want to resist it: "The bottom line is that it will be harder on the teachers," he said. If you took a vote at most schools to do something like this, he said, "I bet 99.9% would vote hell no because what you're asking is that the faculty work a whole lot harder."

Tony Perez, chairman of education for the Latino Townhall in Santa Paula, suggests the school go full speed with the plan.

"I think we have to immerse [the students]," Perez said, "It will be a shock to those who lack the capability, but their brains will be stretched to the point of accepting it."

Sepulveda knows the move will be difficult. During his first year, students from the standard classes often worked against the teacher.

"At the beginning, the lower-level kids were disruptive because they were used to fighting the situation," Sepulveda said. But he soon came to realize the importance of academic peer pressure.

Students from the standard level class began performing at a higher level to live up to the expectations of their peers, many of whom were straight-A students, he said. If they are left in standard classes, the students typically continue to perform at a minimum level, because they aren't surrounded by as many ambitious students, numerous teachers said.

"You have to play on the part that kids are extremely peer-oriented," Sepulveda said. "Elementary school kids want to please the teachers. For high schools kids, the parents are the enemy. The teacher is enemy No. 1. What they look to are their peers. Their peers are everything. They can't resist that."

At Garfield High School,

administrators point out that putting all students in college prep courses provides them with more of an opportunity to attend college.

Take for example, a high school senior, said Garfield Principal Antonio Garcia. "If you don't prepare the kids and he says he wants to go to college, you can't say now go back to ninth grade and take a college prep course."

But over the years, low scores in standardized tests at Garfield High School have not changed dramatically. In 1991-92, students posted a 420 in math and 325 in verbal. Last year's math scores were 30 points lower, while verbal scores rose 50 points.

The number of students attending college has not changed significantly either. In a survey taken in 1992, 80% of the graduating seniors said they would be attending either a four-year or community college. Last year, 79% said they would attend college and 5% said they would enter the service.

Yet, administrators argue that by providing students with college prep courses, you provide them with more options in life.

"Do we give our graduating students choices in life or do we just say this is all you've got and something, such as a job, will choose you," Garcia said.

While administrators are still debating the plan, a few students are already gearing up for next year's change. For freshman Becky Johnson, the transformation at Santa Paula High School is both intimidating and welcome.

"I'm going to be nervous," Becky said, "but I'll get used to it. It's going to be fun. I want the opportunity to work with other people." ■

57. Associated Press

05-21 4:05a

School board adopts policy requiring urine testing of athletes

BLACKFOOT, Idaho (AP) - The Blackfoot School Board has decided to require high school athletes to undergo random urine testing for drugs before they can participate in sports starting this fall.

It is the first district in Idaho to institute such a policy, which trustees say is aimed at helping students who might have a drug problem.

"We wanted to address that problem for the sake of the athletic program, as well as using athletics as an intervention to help kids that might be on" drugs, Assistant Superintendent Vaughn Hugie said Tuesday.

Athletes who test positive for drugs will not automatically be expelled from school, banned from sports or turned over to the police. Instead, they will be

suspended for a short time and encouraged to get help.

"The idea isn't to hang them," Hugie said. "It's that they could hang themselves if they don't get help."

Every team member will be tested at the start of each athletic season, and 10 percent of the team will be randomly selected for testing each week during the season.

LEVEL 1 - 17 OF 345 STORIES

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The Tampa Tribune

May 16, 1997, Friday, METRO EDITION

SECTION: POLK, Pg. 1

LENGTH: 638 words

HEADLINE: Schools show improved test scores

BYLINE: BETH FOUSHEE; of The Tampa Tribune

BODY:

SUMMARY: Some Polk County **schools** still fall below national standards in reading and math, but they showed gains, especially some elementary **schools**.

LAKELAND - Where there's a will, there's a way.

Many Polk County students **tested** below the national average on the Comprehensive **Test** of Basic Skills, or CTBS, a national assessment measuring mastery of reading comprehension and mathematics concepts.

But the county's elementary schools showed great gains, especially some that deal daily with poverty and high mobility among their students - schools put on the state's list of "critically low-performing schools."

The CTBS results reached students and parents this week. The analyzed, countywide results were released by school officials Thursday.

At Eastside Elementary in Haines City, one of two Polk schools on the state list, test results soared 40 points in math. About 70 percent of students there scored above the national norm, up from 30 percent last year.

In reading, 43 percent of Eastside students scored above the national norm, compared with 25 percent last year.

Scores in a statewide writing-assessment test, released a week ago, also showed impressive gains at Eastside.

Winston Elementary in Lakeland, the second Polk school on the state list, also gained ground from a year earlier, although at a much less dramatic rate.

Both schools are expected to come off the state list in the fall.

Polk's elementary school students showed gains in math and reading in every grade that takes the CTBS test. The CTBS test is given to third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students in elementary school.



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The Tampa Tribune, May 16, 1997

In math, 57 percent of the county's fourth-graders scored above the national average in math, compared with 54 percent last year. Fifty-four percent of the third-graders scored above the national norm, up from 53 percent.

Fifty-four percent of the fifth-graders scored above average, compared with 48 percent last year.

In reading, 51 percent of the third-graders scored above the national average, up from 49 percent; 46 percent of fourth-graders scored above average, compared with 44 percent, and 45 percent of fifth-graders scored above average, up from 44 percent.

Babson Park Elementary ranked first-place in math among elementary schools, with 96 percent of students taking the test surpassing statewide criteria. First-place in reading among elementary schools was Brigham Academy in Winter Haven and Valleyview Elementary in Lakeland, with 75 percent of students at each surpassing the criteria.

State standards say at least 33 percent of the students in elementary schools must score above the national norm to remain off the state's low-achieving list.

Middle school students' scores dropped slightly countywide.

In math, half of the eighth-graders scored above the national norm, compared with 52 percent last year; 45 percent of the seventh-graders scored above the median - equaling last year's score. Forty-eight percent of sixth-graders scored above the norm, up from 45 percent.

In reading, 51 percent of the eighth-graders scored above the national norm, down from 55 percent last year; 44 percent of the seventh-graders scored above the norm, the same as last year. Among sixth-graders, 40 percent scored above the norm, down from 41 percent a year earlier.

Lakeland Middle Academy had the highest scores among middle schools, with 85 percent in math and 83 percent in reading.

State standards say that 40 percent of the students in middle schools must score above the national norm.

Averages on how high school students countywide performed on the CTBS weren't released from the district Thursday.

The Harrison Center for the Visual and Performing Arts in Lakeland had the highest scores among high schools: 94 percent in reading, 93 percent in math.

LOAD-DATE: May 17, 1997



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Kids Count report noted that 14 percent of the state's children are living in extreme poverty, which is defined as a family whose income is below 50 percent of the poverty level. The national average for children living in extreme poverty was 9 percent in 1994.

The state's school dropout rate for teens ages 16 to 19 improved slightly from 1985 to 1994, going from 12 percent to 11 percent. But that was still higher than the national average of 9 percent, with the state ranking 35th nationally.

Twenty-two percent of the children in New Mexico are without health insurance (as of 1994) and 44 percent of children in the state ages 3-to-5 years old were not enrolled in nursery schools or kindergarten in 1993.

In New Mexico, agencies such as Youth Development Incorporated and programs such Project Succeed, are

trying to reverse the trend.

Project Succeed is an 11-year-old program devoted to keeping at-risk children in school. It currently works with five high schools in Albuquerque and in Los Lunas and Bernalillo. The project provides classroom instruction to students in traditional subjects such as math and English, but also in such areas as construction, automotive repair and community service.

Miss Montoya has been involved with Project Succeed since her freshman year at Rio Grande High School. She and her sister Marla were raised by their mother, Lollie Johnson, herself a teen mother.

Besides being a solid student, Miss Montoya works about 30 hours a week at an Albuquerque department store. According to Niki Tapia Brito, education coordinator for Project Succeed, Miss Montoya has become much more than a survivor.

"She felt initially she wasn't performing to her potential and didn't know what she wanted to do," Ms. Brito said. "She has become a role model and a very positive influence for other students. She has become so goal oriented that she kind of exudes it and it carries over to other kids."

(The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children and families. In addition to publishing the KIDS COUNT data book, the foundation also funds a national network of state-level KIDS COUNT projects that provide a more detailed picture of the condition of children. New Mexico Advocates for Children and Families has administered the New Mexico KIDS COUNT project since 1992.)■

67. Associated Press

05-04 5:15p

Students, teachers put lips together and blow before dance

By DAWN FALLIK
Associated Press Writer

GRANT, Neb. (AP) - Before heading to the dance floor, 17-year-old Jayme Pankonin secured the spray of baby's breath in her hair, straightened her deep purple dress, then pursed her lips around a straw and blew.

"Very good," said Grant Schools Superintendent Jon Burkey as he read her negative Breathalyzer results Saturday night. "You look wonderful. Welcome to the prom."

Jayme, a junior, was among the 120 students, faculty and chaperones that took the alcohol test required to attend Saturday night's junior-senior prom.

That Breathalyzer moment is becoming as common as the pinning of corsages and the knotting of bow ties for prom-goers as schools nationwide attempt to stop underage drinking on prom night.

In this western Nebraska town of 1,239, the "blow or go" policy is now in its fourth year. While Grant High School tests every person who enters the prom, most other schools test only those students who appear to have been drinking.

In Grant, the breath tests began after a

particularly raucous prom in 1992, when apparently intoxicated students swallowed live goldfish used in table centerpieces, said Burkey. There have been few problems since then, the superintendent said.

Most of the Grant students took the test in stride, even those who flunked the test at first breath. All eventually passed the test.

"I think it's a good idea. Basically if you plan on drinking you know you shouldn't try and come to prom," said junior Mandy Kamla, whose mouthwash caused a positive test. After ten minutes, she was retested, the results were negative and Mandy was allowed into the prom.

Jamye's escort, Brian Cameron, 22, said he had few good memories of the old days, when prom meant parties and plenty of drinking.

"I didn't even make it to my prom, I was too intoxicated to show up," said Cameron. "I think this way is much better."

But those students who are finding themselves on the other end of the blood-alcohol straw for the first time have not been so cooperative.

Students at one Arlington, Texas, high

school arranged an "alternative prom" to protest the school district's new breath test. About 200 students attended the second prom - almost half the entire class of Lamar High School, officials said.

"I think it was important for us to take a stand because we felt like this was a violation of our civil rights and violation of our trust," said Lamar High School student Jeff Hurst, who helped organize the alternative dance. "It's like we are being accused of drinking without cause."

The Nebraska town of Crofton, population 820, is also administering Breathalyzer tests this year. A few years ago, a student who had been drinking got sick during the prom, said Crofton High School Principal Dick Allen.

"I think the whole thing is kind of stupid," said Crofton senior Kelly Drotzman, who said he drank before going to last year's prom. "I think drinking makes things go a little better, a little smoother."

Some students question the effectiveness of an announced test.

"It's just getting kind of old," said Mike Hendricks, a senior at Grant. "Everyone knows they're going to do it, and so you don't drink then. It needs to

be a surprise to make it worth it."
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Eds: LEADS with 3 grafs to UPDATE

05-03 10:46a Clinton, GOP agree to
balance budget, cut taxes over five years
Eds: LEADS with 3 grafs to UPDATE

with Clinton radio address; picks up 2nd
graf, The deal ...; note that grafs 6-7
embargoed for 11:06■

68. Associated Press

05-03 8:20a

Schools seek ways to challenge students

LONDON, Ky. (AP) - Several Kentucky school districts have raised their graduation standards above the state's minimum 20 credits, but Laurel County is easily the most ambitious.

South Laurel and North Laurel high schools now require 28 credits. South Laurel also requires a senior research project and will add an extracurricular activity requirement next year.

Parents and teachers there decided to make high school tougher to get students' attention.

Principal Roger L. Marcum has seen high schoolers cruise through their senior years like zombies.

Educators say it is a familiar shuffle. A lot of teen-agers across the state have found all sorts of ways to get a diploma without getting serious about their studies.

South Laurel has scrapped business math, consumer math, and other basic math courses and now starts freshmen in pre-algebra. Most students earn their math credits in algebra and geometry. Science has gotten a similar facelift.

"We don't just count credits anymore," Marcum said. "There is no more math for the living dead."

Senior Daniel Carter, 17, said he would have preferred to not sweat out his senior year, but can see the benefits of his extra work. With less than a month of school left, he is sweating out his senior presentation on classical mythology.

Tempted to cut corners and enjoy his final weeks, Carter said the requirements are forcing him to stay focused, teaching him about discipline and time management.

"People will tell you it's a pain, but mostly it's a good thing," he said.

The shift toward more academic heavy lifting at South Laurel has been accompanied by a focus on more active

student learning.

The school's greenhouse has become primarily a horticulture lab for students instead of just another place where locals stock up on geraniums. The school has also opened a small-scale working bank where students can get loans for anything from lunch money to prom expenses and work out a payment plan.

Laurel County's two high school councils voluntarily raised standards. And soon, the state may follow, boosting minimum requirements for the class that is now finishing eighth grade.

A legislative panel is scheduled to rule May 13 on raising the state's high school graduation requirements.

The increase would put algebra, biology and art on the schedules of all Kentucky students. States such as Alabama and Florida have recently moved to make high school more challenging. Georgia, Louisiana and North Carolina all now require Algebra I for graduates.

But many educators remain uncertain what effects the change will have in the state's high schools.

If the requirements go through, mathematics credits must be earned in algebra, geometry or some other course higher than the general math many schools now offer.

State officials have always emphasized that its requirements were merely minimum expectations. But some Kentucky teachers wonder if students here can handle even that.

Barbara Miller, who teaches an employability skills class at Breckenridge County High School, fears that her students may be the ones who lose if requirements go up.

"It may be wonderful for 80 percent of the kids, but there are also kids who are not going to be able to move beyond jobs

at Hardee's," she said. "Why do they need algebra? Let's give them what they are going to use in life."

Pat Hurt, the state education department official who has shepherded the higher requirements through four years of debate and revision, said high schools need to change.

"The whole point is to make high school more meaningful," she said. "In national polls, a great majority of high schoolers themselves say they want it to be more challenging."

At South Laurel High, a school where parents, students and teachers have already had to make such adjustments, experience shows that while tougher requirements are a hard sell, they can also get the attention of students cruising through their final years of school.

"We feel like we don't have a choice but to raise expectations," said principal Marcum. "We'd like to make our diplomas mean something again."

Since the school council opted for higher requirements, test scores have increased at both of the county's high schools. High schools statewide have struggled to keep pace with the state's test-score improvement goals, but both Laurel County schools earned cash bonuses from the state. At South Laurel, the number of students taking the ACT and SAT college-entrance exams are up as well.

But dropout rates have accelerated, too. After holding steady at just over 6 percent through the 1993-94 school year, the rate jumped to nearly 9 percent in 1994-95, the state's most recent dropout figures. The higher requirements had been in place for two years by the 1994-95 school year.

The state average has crept up toward 4 percent.■

LEVEL 1 - 29 OF 345 STORIES

Copyright 1997 The Dallas Morning News
THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

April 30, 1997, Wednesday, HOME FINAL EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 31A

LENGTH: 872 words

HEADLINE: Districts celebrate TAAS progress;
Sophomore skills test scores up in reading, writing, math

BYLINE: Anna Macias, Staff Writer of The Dallas Morning News

BODY:

Most Dallas-Fort Worth area school districts Tuesday were celebrating improved performance by sophomores on the state's graduation exam.

In Dallas, for example, 10th-grade students scored higher than ever on the reading, math and writing sections of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills.

About 6,800 students took the test, with 78 percent passing reading, a 14 percent increase from the performance of sophomores four years ago. The passing rate for math was 60 percent, 18 percent higher than it was four years ago. About 80 percent of the students passed writing, an increase of about 11 percent from 1994.

"These results are simply remarkable," Superintendent Yvonne Gonzalez said. "To see gains across the board in every category is nearly impossible. This is the best news we've had in a long time."

Dallas school officials did not make available the number of students who passed all sections of the test.

Bill Webster, the district's director of research and evaluation, said the district is more focused on "outcome measures."

"Schools are looked at in terms of their effectiveness, and teachers are looked at in terms of their effectiveness," he said.

"All of that translates into more focused instruction, in terms of not only the TAAS, but hopefully the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and other measures that we use."

Dallas school officials said they were happy that the achievement gap between ethnic minorities and whites seemed to have narrowed. The 155,000-student school district is 87 percent minority.

African-American 10th-graders were 31 points behind their white peers in 1993 on the reading section of the test but this year are only 14 points apart. Eighty percent of the African-American sophomores passed the reading section of the test. In the math portion, 60 percent passed, and in writing, 83 percent.



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Hispanic sophomores also achieved their best scores yet - 69 percent in reading and 72 percent in writing - but Dr. Gonzalez said she was disappointed that only 53 percent passed the math section.

"I know we can do better, and we will," she said.

Passing rates among white students were 94 percent in reading, 82 in math and 93 in the writing portion.

In Mesquite, school officials were boasting a 73 percent passing rate for all three test sections, an increase of 13 points, nearly twice the state's average rate of improvement of 7 points.

"We would like to say this improvement came from one dramatic strategy, but across the district, we make improvements every day in a thousand ways," said Superintendent John Horn. "If I had to point out one dramatic strategy, it would be the campus improvement plan in which the campus staff sets goals and does strategic planning to achieve those goals."

Garland school officials said they were pleased that five of the district's six high schools had average scores in the 90s on portions of the test. Seventy-six percent of Garland's students passed all sections of the test, compared with 73 percent last year.

"We concentrated on making sure that our minority students used different strategies in learning," said Michael Strozeski, the district's director for research and evaluation. "We especially looked for ways to make math more relevant."

The Fort Worth school district also continued to show improvement in all areas of the test, said Dr. C. Neil Shaw, the district's director of research and evaluation.

"This was supposed to be the year for math, and I think around the state it was," said Dr. Shaw. "But we've made more progress in reading than we did in math. . . . Everybody is focusing on reading everywhere we go in the district, and it seems to be paying off."

Dr. Shaw said officials are particularly pleased with improvement in scores among economically disadvantaged students.

Dr. Whit Johnstone, the Irving school district's director of planning, evaluation and research, said officials there are pleased that 70 percent of students passed all the tests.

"That's a key indicator," he said. "They have to pass all tests to graduate."

Grand Prairie district officials said they are happy with their test results but are still looking to make better scores next year.

"We're pleased," said Dr. Mark Jackson, executive director of that district's planning, evaluation and information services. "But we always believe we can



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improve."

Highland Park High School sophomores received the highest scores they have received in recent years on the TAAS.

Ninety-nine percent of the students passed in the reading and writing tests, and 96 percent in math, the highest scores in four years, district officials said.

Sophomore scores in the Hurst-Euless-Bedford school district jumped to 81 percent overall, up from 73 percent last year. The biggest jump came on the math section of the test, which increased from 77 percent last year to 84 percent.

"I think that everybody takes these tests very seriously," said Madeline Taylor, director of counseling and testing for the district. "Teachers, students, and parents all know it is a real high stake for the kids."

Staff writers Kendall Anderson, Liz Cardenas, Joy Dickinson, Dianna Hunt and Laurie Wilson contributed to this report.

GRAPHIC: CHART(S): (DMN) TAAS Results.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: May 10, 1997



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LEVEL 1 - 34 OF 345 STORIES

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THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

April 23, 1997, Wednesday, ARLINGTON MORNING NEWS EDITION

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 1A

LENGTH: 913 words

HEADLINE: Four schools post higher TAAS;
Lamar shows;
drop in reading portion

BYLINE: Tracey-Lynn Clough, Staff Writer of the Arlington Morning News

BODY:

The percentage of sophomores passing each component of this year's state-mandated TAAS test improved at all but one of Arlington's five high schools.

In the reading portion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test, Lamar High School scored lower than in 1996. The percentage of Lamar sophomores who passed the category declined slightly, to 87 percent this year compared with 89 percent in 1996.

Arlington High School posted the biggest improvement in any of the exam's three academic categories, according to figures released Tuesday by the school district. Seventy-three percent of Arlington High sophomores passed the math portion, a sharp rise from the 64 percent who passed last year.

"We're not pleased with it," said Lamar Principal Jimmy Jones of the lower reading scores. He added that his school concentrated its efforts on improving previously disappointing math scores.

Lamar High's passing rate in the writing portion of the TAAS test remained at 87 percent, the same as last year.

"Our most concentrated efforts were in mathematics," Mr. Jones said. "To be honest, we coasted in what we were doing the year before in our reading and writing programs."

Lamar High's emphasis on math appeared to pay off. Eighty percent of students passed the math component, up from 73 percent in 1996.

Although the school missed its goal of reaching a 90 percent passing rate in reading and writing, the figures show Lamar High is on the right track, Mr. Jones said.

An equal emphasis will be placed on each of the three components for next year's exam, he said.

Arlington High sophomores passed the reading and writing portions at 88



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percent and 87 percent, respectively, a gain of 5 percentage points in each component over 1996.

Arlington High Principal James Adams said he was pleased by his school's performance.

"I'm glad we've made some improvements," he said.

He added that Arlington High will work toward even higher scores in 1998.

"There's no question there is room for improvement," Mr. Adams said. "We are preparing campus goals, and part of those will be to continue to improve those scores."

Overall, 3,189 Arlington sophomores in February took the exam, which students must pass to go to college. Eighty-seven percent of district sophomores who took the test passed the reading section, 75 percent passed in math, and 87 percent passed the writing portion.

Those percentages are up from 1996, when 85 percent passed reading, 70 percent passed math, and 86 percent passed writing.

Statewide, TAAS passing rates improved, with 86 percent passing reading, 72 percent passing math and 88 percent passing the writing portion, according to preliminary figures released Monday by the Texas Education Agency.

"We're delighted with what they were able to accomplish," Superintendent Lynn Hale said Tuesday. "We're very pleased with the progress. It shows great growth."

Trustee John McInnis said the good showing compares well with the statewide results.

"We're keeping up and getting ahead," Mr. McInnis said. "How can you not feel good about the results."

TEA spokeswoman DeEtta Culbertson said the statewide results show that students are "getting more of the basics in the classroom."

However, while sophomore scores increased over last year, 7 percent of Texas seniors have not yet passed the reading, writing and math portions, according to state figures.

Seniors who failed to pass a portion of the TAAS exam will get another chance during testing Tuesday, said Ms. Culbertson. The TEA will not release final figures until June, she said.

The recently released figures will not impact Arlington's rating by the TEA as an academically acceptable school district.

Of the state's 1,044 school districts, 37 are rated exemplary, 208 are rated recognized, 786 are deemed academically acceptable, and 13 are rated academically unacceptable, Ms. Culbertson said.

Ratings are based on the percentage of students in varying ethnic groups who



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pass the TAAS test, as well as attendance and drop-out rates.

Mrs. Hale said attendance and drop-out rates for Arlington students will not be released until the close of the school year in May.

Arlington school officials say they will aggressively seek to improve the district's rating to exemplary by 2000.

"We need to move heaven and Earth to make it happen," Mr. McInnis said. "We need to be single-minded in our goal because we have only a short three years to accomplish an exemplary rating."

The district has developed incentive programs to help students achieve higher scores on TAAS exam. One offers money to campuses that improve their rankings.

Depending on the level of improvement, campuses may receive \$ 5,000 to \$ 20,000 in additional funds for enrichment programs to assist students with the TAAS.

Those efforts are beginning to work, some trustees said.

"We expect the figures to go up, and the kids keep proving us right," said trustee Barbara Nash. "They're making **improvements**, and that is the most important thing."

However, **school** ratings will not be reviewed until the TEA tabulates the results of TAAS exams that will be administered to third- through eighth-grade students next week.

Texas elementary and junior high students will take the math portion of the exam Tuesday and the reading portion April 30. No writing portion is administered to those students, Ms. Culbertson said.

She said results probably won't be available until August.

GRAPHIC: CHART(S): (AMN) TAAS results.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: May 7, 1997



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LEVEL 1 - 39 OF 345 STORIES

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Austin American-Statesman

April 22, 1997

SECTION: Metro/State; Pg. B2

LENGTH: 651 words

HEADLINE: TAAS scores up 7 percent statewide; Early results show improvement

BYLINE: JODI BERLS AND KEVIN WISHARD

BODY:

Texas high school sophomores, including many in Central Texas, continued to **improve** scores on the **test** they all must pass to graduate -- the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills -- preliminary figures released Monday showed.

Statewide, 67 percent of the 10th graders taking the high school-level exam passed all three sections of the **test** given in February, according to the Texas Education Agency. That's an increase of 7 percent over last year.

Minority students showed slightly stronger gains but continued to lag significantly behind whites in overall scores: Among African American students, 48 percent passed the test, up from 38 percent last year; Hispanic students gained 8 percent to a 52 percent passing rate; white student scores rose 7 percent to 81 percent passing, according to the Texas Education Agency.

Preliminary results of the exit test come as students at elementaries, middle schools and high schools prepare to take the TAAS next week -- scores that will be used to calculate overall accountability ratings in all districts in August.

In the Austin district, all 10 high schools showed **improvement** in scores on the math portion of the TAAS, with some making double-digit gains. Tenth-grade students at McCallum High School went from an average score of 67 percent passing to 80 percent.

We think it's time to celebrate," said Superintendent Jim Fox.

Officials in many districts surrounding Austin said they are preparing for next week's TAAS and haven't analyzed the preliminary results from February's test. Still, most knew their overall performance.

Round Rock officials said 84 percent of the district's sophomores not enrolled in special education classes passed the exit exam. That was an increase of 7 percent over 1996 results, said Zena Trcka, assessment coordinator.

Westwood High School led the way, with 99 percent passing the reading and writing tests and 93 percent passing math.

Linda Watkins, Westwood's principal, said teachers set high expectations and are demanding of students.



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Austin American-Statesman, April 22, 1997

We do get good students from our feeder schools, but some of them haven't passed their tests (as eighth-graders), so there is work to do.''

Preliminary results show San Marcos sophomores are hitting higher marks than last year's class, said Bea Flores, an assistant superintendent for the San Marcos school district. Scores in reading and math were up, and writing scores matched the 90 percent passing rate of the year before.

Flores said the class's overall passing rate was 61 percent.

In Bastrop, the passing rate on math tests shot from 53 percent to 80 percent. In writing, 95 percent passed compared with 81 percent the previous year.

Betty Richardson, director of academic programs for Bastrop's school district, said passing rates among black students showed dramatic improvements but remain below the district's goals. Half of the 24 black sophomores passed this year. In 1996, only one of the 15 sophomores tested passed.

Bob Phillips, an assistant superintendent for the Georgetown school district, said scores for sophomores were better this year than in 1996. He said reading and writing passing rates were over 90 percent.

The results were particularly good news for Austin, where in recent years nearly all of its high schools have been rated low-performing either for poor test scores or for high dropout rates. After last year's results left 11 schools -- including five high schools -- with the low-performing label, school officials pledged to get all its schools off the list in 1997.

The district announced early in the year that preliminary numbers indicate no high schools will be rated low-performing for dropout rates.

We expect to have absolutely no schools on the low-performing list,''

Deputy Superintendent Kay Psencik.

LOAD-DATE: April 22, 1997



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Associated Press

04-18 1:30a

Hartford High students confused about how state takeover affects them

By NICOLE SCHIAVI

Associated Press Writer

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) - The newest course offering at embattled Hartford High School is State Takeover 101, and students had plenty of questions.

The Connecticut General Assembly approved the takeover of Hartford schools Wednesday, dissolving Hartford's school board June 1, and giving a panel of state-appointed trustees control over the district's finances.

On Thursday, House Speaker Tom Ritter held an assembly with the 1,670 students to explain what they can expect.

"We're not going to let adults mess up your life," said Ritter, D-Hartford. "The adults that let you down were politicians. The adults that stood up for you were your teachers."

Hartford is the first Connecticut community forced to give up full control of its 23 schools and 24,000 students to the state for the next three years.

Poor academics, high dropout rates and the state's worst test scores were compounded by an accreditation board's recent vote to revoke the Hartford High School's accreditation, and fueled support for the takeover.

Ritter was bombarded with questions

and opinions from his young audience. Student views ranged from outright indignation to an attitude of good riddance to the Hartford Board of Education.

He defended the state's decision, telling the students that the takeover is in their best interest and that the local school board's performance was a sham that needed to be stopped.

He told students that the purpose of the state takeover is to save the schools from losing accreditation, but he warned they should expect bad news before things start to improve.

The students seemed to have a hard time digesting and separating the two main issues at hand: the state takeover and the impending loss of accreditation.

Students also asked Ritter why the state offered money to keep the Hartford Whalers hockey team in town before giving money to the schools.

The takeover bill makes Hartford Public High School eligible for \$20.5 million in state money for construction.

"The governor really doesn't care about our education," freshman Dwyane Pitts said. "(The takeover) made a lot of us happy, but I'm upset because the government felt it could give \$20 million

to (the Whalers) first."

Freshman Wilfredo Ruiz supported the state takeover.

"I think its good because the (Hartford) Board of Education wasn't doing nothing," said Wilfredo Ruiz, a freshman.

Senior Chris Wyatt partly agreed, faulting the school board for not getting enough money to fix the problems at the school, which is losing its accreditation. But Wyatt is strongly opposed to the state takeover, and he defended the teachers and staff.

"We don't need the state to come in and take over the school," Wyatt said. "We work just as hard as any other students."

Students also rallied behind Principal Amado Cruz, voicing strong opposition to the governor's call for his transfer. One student drew wild applause when he yelled out, "If Mr. Cruz go, we all go."

Ritter did not say whether he supported the governor's statement, which was made Wednesday. The students were told that sometimes situations need to be defused and such episodes put behind.

Cruz said after the assembly he is confident he has Ritter's support. ■

USA Today

April 18, 1997

Texas city ahead of the class in school standards

By John Ritter

USA TODAY

Wynn Seale's kids come from the city's most gang-infested neighborhoods, so poor that 95% of the kids qualify for free or subsidized school lunches.

Stern discipline helped turn around this knot of low expectations. But the real key to better performance was a single-minded focus on establishing tough academic standards, a focus that has made this south Texas port city virtually without equal nationwide.

"Standards took the mystery out of

learning," says Wynn Seale principal Richard Peltz. "Our kids know exactly what's expected of them. And they know we expect a lot. There aren't any more excuses."

The hue and cry for higher standards has gained momentum in the last decade behind corporate leaders, education reformers and politicians, including President Clinton. But the pace of school reform and the move to curriculums based on standards have been slow.

Supporters say tough standards are a way to inject consistency and

competitiveness into American schools at a time when students change schools often, when the nation's employers knock schools for turning out unemployable graduates and when U.S. students' test scores trail those of Asian and European students.

Yet, not many schools have tough standards, and even fewer enforce them. Standards are a highly charged issue for school boards and state legislatures. Conservatives often object that the government is trying to dictate what should be taught. Liberals worry about

how poor kids, minorities and immigrants will fare when the academic bar is raised.

Little progress nationwide

The public seems to have no appetite for national standards. A Bush administration proposal to set national standards bombed. President Clinton is trying to jawbone the states, but progress is fitful. Of standards that do exist - state or local - few are world-class.

Corpus Christi, however, stands out as an example of what can be done when there is the will to do it. No large school district has pushed the envelope the way this city has. It has set standards for what its 42,000 students should know and be able to do in every subject in every grade - from dates, facts, trends and concepts to problem-solving, experimentation and essay-writing. And it demands that teachers teach them and students learn them.

As simple as that sounds - as fashionable as it sounds - it's not happening to the degree that education reformers say it should if the nation's schools are to rise above mediocrity.

"What we still see is that it's going to take more than just talk to arrive at high-quality standards," says Matt Gandel, director of education issues for the American Federation of Teachers.

The teachers union, behind its late president Albert Shanker, has long pushed for tougher standards, and it keeps track of progress. Its annual review last year found that only 15 states have standards in math, English, science and social studies "that are clear, specific and well-grounded in content."

Two states - Iowa and Wyoming - have no standards at all. In 12 states, standards in all four core subjects fail to meet the teachers-union criteria. The remaining 21 states and the District of Columbia have standards that fail in one, two or three subjects.

And many standards simply don't measure up because they're too vague, wordy or all-inclusive to be useful as practical learning guides.

An example, from Oregon, that falls short: Students are required to "demonstrate the ability to think critically and creatively in solving problems." And one from Corpus Christi that measures up: "Analyze the development of individual rights in the United States from 1865-present."

Texas' standards meet teachers-union criteria in all four subjects, and students from grade three on take state English

and math tests annually. But students don't have to pass the tests to be promoted. And although students must pass a high school exit exam to graduate, it is based in part on eighth-grade, not 12th-grade, standards.

Most states that have set standards, rigorous or not, don't take the critical extra step of requiring students to pass tests based on them. So there's no guarantee schools will use the standards. Corpus Christi's standards not only are more rigorous than Texas', but students have to master them to graduate.

Pushing for change

So how is it that this oil and petrochemical hub, the nation's sixth-busiest port, a middle-sized city with a Hispanic majority, has moved to the forefront of the academic standards movement?

Employers were complaining that high school graduates lacked basic skills. More than half the graduates who enrolled in a community college were taking at least one remedial class. "Basically there was no consistency in what was being taught," says Sandra Lanier-Lerma, assistant superintendent for instruction.

"I have five Biology I (one) teachers," says King High School principal Sherry Blackett. "There was no way to be sure that students got the same amount of instruction in the most important things."

The realization touched off a two-year crusade that brought together parents, teachers and experts. The final product: Real World Academic Standards - 50 pages of the stuff students must know and how they are to show they know it, from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade.

King and 22 other schools tested the standards in 1995-96. All 61 schools adopted them this school year, and every student was immediately accountable.

"Last year no one really liked them," says junior Morgan Switzer, 17. "This year it's a lot easier.

"You study for the performance standards, you learn the information to pass them and then you retain the knowledge much longer than if you had just crammed for an exam."

Senior Hillary Towers, 18, says, "You know exactly what you're supposed to be learning, and you know you have to learn it by the end of the year. You're prepared for it."

Some high school parents balked when their children failed to master standards and lost sports and

extracurricular eligibility under Texas' no pass, no play rule.

"We told them student achievement is non-negotiable," Blackett says.

To the surprise of many, the district's overall course failure rate is down slightly this year. The presumption had been that more students would struggle under tougher standards. "Kids will rise to the expectations you set for them," Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra says.

But Corpus Christi's transition was helped by other elements of its standards initiative that experts say are crucial to success:

A discipline code, which stripped away disruptions to learning. Anything that smacks of gang influence - certain caps and jewelry, untucked T-shirts with baggy pants - is banned. Regular testing that determines whether the standards are being taught. Students must show their mastery of standards as they learn them. Grades don't hinge on one big final exam. Programs that kick in quickly to help students who are falling behind - before-school and after-school tutoring, Saturday classes and "clustering" students who are struggling with the same standards. Summer school was restructured so students go just long enough to pass standards they had failed. A ban on "social promotion," allowing students to advance from grade to grade whether they pass. "On the social promotion issue, few if any places match up to Corpus Christi," says Gandel of the teachers union.

Outlawing social promotion may be the best insurance that standards are met, but few districts have the stomach for it. Some experts think the emotional distress children suffer when they're held back is worse than the academic repercussions of promoting kids who fail.

They don't buy that in Corpus Christi, although the real test of the policy won't come till the end of this school year, when for the first time students could be held back for failing standards. Linda Bridges, president of the teachers union local, says teachers are anxious to see whether the district follows through.

Saavedra says: "We're not going to socially promote."

Taking the next steps

Across the district, there's a level of cooperation that outsiders say is rare in an education bureaucracy. A key to success is that teachers had a central role in drafting the standards.

As a result, Corpus Christi has moved on to issues that aren't even on the radar

screens of most other districts. Grading, for example. It became apparent that the best set of standards could fall prey to the grading quirks of teachers. Corpus Christi is now experimenting with scoring criteria for every standard.

Teachers also are shifting to more active and hands-on learning. A buzzword districtwide is "products" - charts, portfolios, displays, demonstrations, research - that students create, often in teams, as they learn. Students are more motivated.

Corpus Christi is trying to incorporate more reading, writing and math into the other subjects. Until high school, you don't take English, you take "language arts," a combination of reading, writing, speaking and listening. A reading course is required for all high school freshmen.

Teachers find that some textbooks no longer measure up to Corpus Christi standards, and that has put a premium on finding other resources. Now it's not just social studies teachers requesting maps for classrooms; language arts and science teachers want them, too.

Math gets a huge push. A goal is that all students pass algebra by eighth grade. Computation takes a back seat to

problem-solving. "If students can verbalize about math, they retain it longer," algebra teacher Jerrie Barker says. "What we had been doing was not working."

The district has no meaningful data yet to prove that tougher standards are raising performance. And it may not have any for a few years, because standards are not a quick-fix. Lanier-Lerma is quick to point out that some schools, and some principals, lag behind others.

But anecdotal evidence is encouraging. Test scores seem to be heading up. Blackett says some of last year's King High graduates who resisted standards the most have come back to tell her they were wrong, that they benefited from a single year of higher expectations.

Most teachers are believers. "Before, you closed your door and you didn't want anyone to know what you were doing," says Ann Rall, a seventh-grade language arts teacher. "Teachers used to keep their successes to themselves. Now we want to share our successes."

In just two years, standards clearly are driving public education here. They dominate school meetings. Banners and

posters everywhere preach standards. Teachers laminate them and post them in classrooms. Students know what they have to master and when. Parents are becoming familiar with them.

"We're after higher-order thinking skills," says Wynn Seale principal Peltz. "We're used to hearing teachers say, 'Tell me, listen, restate.' Now we're hearing 'Evaluate, create, defend, justify, give reasons.'"

Peltz and his teachers have made a lot of progress with Wynn Seale's at-risk student population. But he thinks taking them to the next level, the district's goal of 90% passing state tests, will be much harder. "Anyone can take a school to 60% or 70%," he says. "The research says we're going to plateau next year, and the kids will slip."

"So we'll try more radical strategies. Maybe extend the day, regroup children every other day. Teach, assess and regroup. The paradigm is going to have to be broken by the parents. Maybe the parents of underachievers will have to come to school once a week, learn how to help their kids with homework."

"We'll have to be more radical." ■

Minneapolis Star Tribune

April 18, 1997

Pennsylvania campus tames some of Minnesota's toughest kids

Star Tribune

CONCORDVILLE, PA. — As the remains of a snowstorm melted into a spring morning, Duane Nelson gazed at the lush grass, the stately brick buildings and the grand stone library. And, smiling into the sun, he basked in the hope of redemption.

The 18-year-old gang member from the Minneapolis area was forced to come here, to Glen Mills Schools, for severely beating another young man. Staring at a four-year sentence in adult prison if he messes up again, Nelson sees this pretty but tough-talking private school for delinquent boys as his last chance to bloom.

"I am lucky to be here," he said. "I am very lucky to be here."

This week, key leaders in Minnesota

are trying to ensure that kids such as Nelson don't have to travel 2,000 miles from home to get that chance.

There is no place like Glen Mills in Minnesota. A state that prides itself on an abundance of programs for society's ills sends hundreds of its toughest and most violent juveniles to out-of-state facilities at a cost of about \$5 million each year.

That's not to say Minnesota has no place to keep kids who set fires, steal cars or rape people. But state and local officials acknowledge that it's a hodgepodge of a system. It locks up a few kids, tries to treat many and casts others adrift. And nobody knows whether any of it works.

One study showed that 90 percent of kids sent to the "reform schools" at Red

Wing and Sauk Centre committed new crimes within five years — numbers that alarm parents and communities as they watch delinquent juveniles turn into dangerous adults.

Like other states, Minnesota has long focused on locking up more adults for more years. This year, the Legislature is taking a closer look at the places we send young criminals.

The proposals range from boot camps for first- and second-time offenders to transforming Red Wing or Sauk Centre into a place that would reform even the worst — a place like Glen Mills.

Praised for its educational and vocational programs, yet knocked for its reliance on discipline over soul-searching, Glen Mills has inspired

LEVEL 1 - 73 OF 345 STORIES

Copyright 1997 Times Publishing Company
St. Petersburg Times

February 25, 1997, Tuesday

SECTION: HERNANDO TIMES; Pg. 1

DISTRIBUTION: HERNANDO TIMES

LENGTH: 648 words

HEADLINE: County's college prep scores rise

BYLINE: ERIC WOODMAN

BODY:

In two years, graduates of Hernando County's public high schools have gone from being the least prepared for college in the Tampa Bay area to among the best, according to the results of a test given to freshmen at Florida's public colleges and universities.

And for the first time, students who attended Hernando schools performed better than the statewide average.

"Any time you can improve your test scores you have to be pleased," Superintendent John Sanders said. "I don't think this represents any sort of change on our part. We have various people who work hard. Our goal is to get better every year."

As the state average has dropped, the percentage of students from Hernando who passed the test has risen for several years. The test measures new college students' aptitude in three areas: math, writing and reading.

The test, given last fall, showed that 59.1 percent of college freshmen who graduated from Hernando high schools were prepared for college work in all three areas. The state average was 54.1 percent.

Students who fail an area of the test are given remedial classes at their college.

Among Hernando's three high schools, Hernando High in Brooksville did the best job of preparing its college-bound students. Seventy-one percent of Hernando High graduates passed the test, compared with 58.1 percent for Central High, west of Brooksville, and 54.4 percent for Springstead High in Spring Hill.

Springstead's scores were weighted down by just 50.4 percent passing the writing part of the test, versus 80.7 percent at Hernando High and 76.8 percent at Central.



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Because only students attending Florida public colleges and universities take the test, Sanders warned against assuming that one school is providing a better or worse education.

"There are a lot of factors to consider," he said. "We don't even know who is taking the test. Some of our best students may be going (to college) out of state."

Taylor Culler, educational policy analyst with the Florida Department of Education, said that although results can be deceiving, the overall picture for Hernando is good.

"Scores in the state have dropped for five years in a row, and they've been going up in Hernando County," he said. "That's something people there should be proud of."

In the past three years, the percentage of Hernando graduates passing the test has gone from 51.1 percent to 54.4 percent to 59.1 percent.

As with the rest of the state's districts, students entering community colleges were less prepared for college than students going to four-year schools.

Just 43.3 percent of the community college students from Hernando County passed all three areas of the test, compared with 96 percent of those going to four-year colleges or universities.

Statewide, 37.1 percent were ready in community colleges and 91.5 percent were prepared for four-year schools.

Test grades show improvement

Nearly 300 Hernando County high school graduates took the readiness-for-college test this year at one of Florida's public universities, colleges or community colleges. For the first time, Hernando's students finished above the state average. Numbers indicate the percentage of students who passed each area of the test. The "overall" category reflects the percentage of students who passed math, writing and reading.

	Math	Writing	Reading	Overall
Central High	69.5%	76.8%	85.4%	58.1%
Hernando High	84.3%	80.7%	89.2%	71.1%
Springstead High	69.9%	58.4%	73.7%	54.4%
Hernando district	73.8%	74.2%	81.2%	59.1%
State averages	68.5%	72.0%	75.8%	54.1%

Source: Florida Department of Education

GRAPHIC: COLOR CHART; Chart listing test results for the readiness-for-college test for students at Central High, Hernando High, Springstead High, the



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Hernando district and state averages, includes a pencil writing "A, B, C."

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: February 26, 1997



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LEVEL 1 - 80 OF 345 STORIES

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February 13, 1997, Thursday KY:KENTUCKY

SECTION: NEWS Pg.01B

LENGTH: 760 words

HEADLINE: **Schools** to share \$ 27.7 million in KERA rewards

BYLINE: GIL LAWSON, The Courier-Journal

SOURCE: STAFF

DATELINE: FRANKFORT, Ky.

BODY:

A check is in the mail to 533 Kentucky **schools** as part of the state's reward system for **improved test scores**.

The Department of Education announced yesterday the **schools** will share \$ 27.7 million this year, the second time reward money has been distributed.

The rewards will range from \$ 1,155 to \$ 2,310 for each teacher at those **schools**, depending upon the level of **improvement**.

Under Kentucky's school accountability system, schools that exceed their goals on tests are eligible for cash rewards every two years. The test results determine the amount of the reward. Teachers, counselors, librarians and principals can vote to decide what to do with the money.

Two years ago some schools voted to share money with other employees such as janitors and cooks, some set aside money for scholarships and others used it for school projects. In a handful of districts the method used to hand out the money was challenged in lawsuits by teachers who had left the school, but none of the challenges has been successful.

The expectation of receiving the reward money "hasn't posed a problem yet" for the staff at Wellington Elementary in Jefferson County, said Principal Verna Cahoon. A committee of teachers was assigned to come up with options on what to do with the \$ 44,732 the school will get.

Teachers at Slaughter Elementary, another of the 41 Jefferson County schools receiving rewards, have been busy preparing students for this year's test, which will start in April, and haven't decided what they'll do with the money, Principal Eugene Kelly said. "We can't let this go to our heads," he said.

He also plans to have a committee consider options for dividing the \$ 39,047.

When the test scores were released last October, the state said 502 schools



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would share in rewards. But adjustments and corrections made in the scores have added to the total, Department of Education spokeswoman Lisa York Gross said.

Also sharing in the money will be 35 central offices for districts that were placed in the reward category.

The amount of money for each teacher is down from two years ago because more schools and teachers qualified for the rewards. Last year, 14,126 people qualified to share \$ 26.1 million and the reward amount ranged between \$ 1, 301 and \$ 2,602 for each teacher. This year the money is being divided among 16,074 people. The amounts could differ depending on what the teachers and schools decide to do with the money.

The state has set aside \$ 506,497 because 43 schools are appealing their test scores to the state Board of Education. Some of those schools, which have hearings scheduled in the next few weeks, could qualify for reward money if their appeal is successful.

Any leftover money will be held until the next reward payment in two years.

The reward money is part of an accountability system established by the Kentucky Education Reform Act. Schools are held accountable, based on the test scores, and can get rewards or face sanctions.

Some critics contend the reward system is flawed because the **test** and the way **improvement** is measured isn't reliable. Others think that reward money should not be used as an incentive.

A recent survey by the Kentucky Institute for Education Research showed a split between educators and the general public when they were asked whether rewards and sanctions were necessary to **improve school** performance.

Just over a third of the principals and teachers agreed rewards and sanctions were necessary; more than 80 percent of public school parents and members of the general public agreed.

LANGUAGE: English

LOAD-DATE: February 14, 1997



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LEVEL 1 - 113 OF 345 STORIES

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THE HARTFORD COURANT

January 14, 1997 Tuesday, 2 WEST CENTRAL

SECTION: TOWN NEWS; Pg. B1

LENGTH: 419 words

HEADLINE: PLAINVILLE STUDENTS' TEST SCORES GO UP IN MOST AREAS

BYLINE: FRAN SILVERMAN; Courant Staff Writer

DATELINE: PLAINVILLE --

BODY:

Students in fourth, sixth and eighth grade showed marked **improvement** on the Connecticut Mastery **Tests**, with scores rising in almost all categories and across the grade levels.

The results of the exam, released by **school** officials Monday, showed that the scores were **improving** among the same group of students who took the **test** as fourth-graders, then as sixth- and eighth-graders. The **test** results also showed the percentage of students in fourth and sixth grades scoring at or above state goals increased in all areas of the **test** since it was first given in 1993.

The mastery test measures the proficiency of fourth-, sixth- and eighth-graders in reading, writing and mathematics. Its goal is to establish high educational standards and ensure that students can apply their academic skills to realistic, everyday problems.

The most significant increase came in writing. In 1993, 36 percent of fourth-graders reached the state goal; in 1996, 51 percent did. In 1993, 47 percent of all sixth-graders scored at or above the state goal, while in 1996, that rose to 60 percent. Eighth-grade scores also rose, with 33 percent of students meeting or exceeding the state goal in 1993, and 66 percent doing so in 1996.

In reading, the number of students in fourth-grade scoring at or above the state reading goal increased from 54 percent in 1993 to 59 percent in 1996; in sixth grade, 58 percent scored at or above the state goal in 1993, compared with 66 percent in 1996; and in eighth grade, 53 percent hit the state goal in 1993, compared with 57 percent in 1996.

In math, fourth-grade scores also rose. In 1993, 49 percent scored at or above the state goal, while in 1996, that had increased to 60 percent. Forty-three percent of sixth- graders scored at or above the goal in 1993; the number jumped to 55 percent in 1996.

But the percentage of eighth- graders who met or exceeded the state goal in mathematics dropped from 55 percent in 1993 to 48 percent in 1996. And mathematics scores dropped among fourth-graders in 1994 who took the test again



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in sixth grade from 61 percent to 55 percent meeting the state goal.

School officials said they'd be examining the results.

"I am just tickled pink in those improvements over time," said Superintendent James P. Ritchie. "In the history of my career, I haven't seen them pop up quite that fast."

"I attribute improvement trends to the focus on literacy in the past five years," Curriculum Director Kathleen Binkowski told the school board.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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January 11, 1997 Saturday, 7 HARTFORD NORTH FINAL

SECTION: METRO HARTFORD; Pg. B3

LENGTH: 500 words

HEADLINE: WINDSOR IMPROVES SCORES ON STATE TEST

BYLINE: MARIE K. SHANAHAN; Courant Staff Writer

DATELINE: WINDSOR --

BODY:

The first results of the **school** system's push to **improve** students' writing skills are starting to show.

According to Connecticut Mastery **Test** scores released this week, the percentage of eighth-graders reaching or exceeding the state goal in writing has more than doubled from 21 percent in 1995 to 43 percent in 1996.

Significant improvements in writing were also made by fourth- grade and sixth-grade students, with an additional 13 percent of fourth-graders and 15 percent of sixth-graders meeting the state goals on the standardized tests in 1996.

"We're very pleased with the results," said Assistant Superintendent of Schools Carol MacMullen. "It shows we were able to create momentum for everyone in the district to focus on writing -- students, teachers, administrators and parents."

The mastery test measures the proficiency of fourth-, sixth- and eighth-graders in reading, writing and mathematics. Its goal is to establish high educational standards and ensure students can apply their academic skills to realistic, everyday problems.

Writing scores were the one area **school** officials recognized as needing major **improvement** after **test** results in 1995 and 1994 showed most town students were lagging, MacMullen said.

After being berated by residents because of the low scores, school staff members developed an action plan for **improvement**, said **school** board member Tim Curtis.

"We focused on instruction in writing rather than just making students write," MacMullen said. "We made writing [all teachers'] responsibility. Writing wasn't just for English classes, but for science and math classes, too. It should be used in every area."

MacMullen said the system also developed a way to monitor student writing



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skills by administering quarterly writing exercises similar to those on the mastery test.

Sixth- and eighth-graders are tested in expository and persuasive writing, while fourth-grade students are tested in narrative writing.

"Whatever the staff did obviously worked," Curtis said. "It's very gratifying to see Windsor students moving in the right direction."

Overall, the system **improved** eight of its nine mastery **test** scores. The only decline came in fourth- grade mathematics, where 56 percent of students met the state goal, compared with 61 percent in 1995.

This chart shows the percentage of Windsor students scoring at or above the goal in reading, writing and mathematics on the Connecticut Mastery Test for 1996 compared with the town scores in 1995 and the state average for 1995. The state averages for 1996 have not been released.

GRADE 4th 6th 8th

Math

Windsor '96

56 53 52

Ct. Avg. '95

59 48 47

Windsor '95

61 48 49

Reading

Windsor '96

54 61 63

Ct. Avg. '95

48 59 59

Windsor '95

51 60 61

Writing

Windsor '96

54 36 43

Ct. Avg. '95



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46 40 46
Windsor '95

41 21 21

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January 10, 1997 Friday, 3 ENFIELD NORTH CENTRAL

SECTION: TOWN NEWS; Pg. B1

LENGTH: 497 words

HEADLINE: SOMERS STUDENTS' TEST SCORES RISE;
IMPROVEMENT SEEN IN 8 OF 9 CATEGORIES

BYLINE: DON STACOM; Courant Correspondent

DATELINE: SOMERS --

BODY:

The school district reported widespread improvement in scores on the 1996 Connecticut Mastery Test, with an especially strong rise in results on the eighth-grade writing section of the exam.

In eight of nine test categories, students who took the test in the fall did better than those who took it a year earlier.

"This shows a lot of hard work on behalf of the students, the staff and the administration," Superintendent Paul Gagliarducci said Thursday. "We're hoping to use this to raise our base line and go on from there."

Each year, fourth-, sixth- and eighth-graders across the state take the test, which measures skills in reading, writing and mathematics. This year's results showed that roughly two-thirds of Somers students met the state's performance goals in reading and math, with a slightly lower average in writing.

The single most dramatic rise was in eighth-grade writing. In 1994 and again in 1995, only 38 percent of Somers eighth-graders reached the state goal. In 1996, that figure shot up to 71 percent.

As dramatic as that improvement appears, Gagliarducci still recommended that parents and observers not draw too many conclusions from any single test.

In eighth-grade writing, for instance, a large percentage of students who fell below the goal in past years were missing by only one or two points out of the possible 12 that could be scored, Gagliarducci said.

"You really have to take a look at things over a period of years. You can't tell too much from one snapshot," he said.

At the elementary school, teachers are regularly getting time to discuss students' writing skills and performance, Gagliarducci said. That appears to be paying off.

"We're starting to see results and we'll be seeing even more results," he



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said.

Gagliarducci will present a more detailed examination of the mastery test results and a comparison with scores from similar school districts in the state in February.

"At first blush, it looks like it was solid," school board Chairwoman Janice Budington said. "Some areas really looked like we made significant advances in places we were watching."

* Numbers reflect percentage of students meeting state standard:

GRADE 4

1996 1995 1994

Mathematics 77 56 64

Writing 52 48 48

Reading 64 50 49

GRADE 6

1996 1995 1994

Mathematics 62 55 49

Writing 62 52 37

Reading 70 66 79

GRADE 8

1996 1995 1994

Mathematics 69 55 69

Writing 71 38 38

Reading 70 66 79

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: January 10, 1997



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December 27, 1996, Friday

SECTION: Annapolis; Pg. A12

LENGTH: 526 words

HEADLINE: **Schools improve test scores**

BYLINE: By MIMI EUBANK Staff Writer

BODY:

A number of Annapolis teachers, principals and students went home for the holidays with an extra present this year: a shining performance on statewide assessment **tests**.

Many of Annapolis' seven elementary **schools** can claim responsibility for comments from state officials that the county **school** system is one of the fastest-**improving school** systems in Maryland.

Every Annapolis **school** showed **improvements** in some areas of the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program **tests**. Three elementary **schools** — West Annapolis, Georgetown East and Rolling Knolls — **improved** in every subject. Annapolis student accomplishments on the statewide **tests**, and what they're learning in preparation for them, will go a long way, said Joan Briscoe, principal of West Annapolis.

"MSPAP as an instructional model is a step in the right direction," she said, adding that the tests "set higher expectations for teachers and students."

Eastport third- and fifth-graders scored higher in 11 of the 12 subtests; Germantown and Hillsmere gained in nine of the areas.

Annapolis Elementary School scored higher in six of the subtests, finishing with a school composite score of 37.3, while Tyler Heights **improved** in seven. That **school**, however, finished with a low composite score of 26 percent.

Mills-Parole third- and fifth graders received a 32.35 percent composite score, gaining in eight of the subtests.

Annapolis Middle School eighthgraders made gains in four of the six areas, while Bates Middle students scored higher in three of the subtests.

Each year, the MSPAP tests

third-, fifth- and eighth-grade students in six areas: reading, writing, language usage, mathematics, science and social studies.

By the year 2000, schools where at least 70 percent of the students are not scoring satisfactorily in every subtest face a takeover by the state.



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The Capital, December 27, 1996

Many of the Annapolis elementary schools, such as Eastport and West Annapolis, credit better comprehension skills for MSPAP test improvements.

"Eastport has been improving for three years in a row," said James Seamon, principal of Eastport.

Students gain a better understanding in all areas by reading and writing more about whatever they're studying, Mr. Seamon said.

"There are no true or false or multiple choice answers anymore. They must be able to explain themselves," Mr. Seamon said.

"They've certainly received dividends."

Eastport third-graders made improvements in every subtest, finishing with a composite score of 48.25 percent. Fifth-graders scored higher in all but the writing test. Their composite score was 48.5.

Students at West Annapolis are also very close to meeting the 70 percent state standard, prompting the state to single out the school when the state results were released earlier this month.

The third- and fifth-grade composite score at the school was 58.5 percent.

Last year, Hillsmere Elementary School was placed on a countywide list of schools that could be in danger of being taken over by the state.

This year, fifth-graders improved in every area except reading, while third-graders improved in all but reading and social studies.

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