

La. schools among three states recognized for exceptional progress

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Louisiana Gannett News

Louisiana is one of three states being recognized by the Southern Regional Education Board for showing exceptional progress in narrowing the achievement gap among black, Hispanic and white high school students on the state's comprehensive exams required for high school graduation.

Louisiana has seen a 24 percent jump in achievement by black students since 2002. Hispanic students showed 22 percent improvement, and white students improved by 13 percent.

High school students in Louisiana are required to pass the GEE, a comprehensive exam, in math and English to graduate high school.

Students who do not reach proficient levels in either subject are offered summer remediation in that course area. Louisiana is one of 25 states nationwide that require districts to offer remediation.

Overall, Louisiana has shown a steady increase in pass rates of the GEE in both math and English/language arts since 2003, leading the southern region with a 3 percentage point gain between 2005 and 2006 for reading/language arts.

"These results on statewide high school exams are significant," said Dave Spence, president of the Southern Regional Education Board. "This is the first time SREB has been able to report such narrowing of achievement gaps for black and Hispanic students. It is critical for states to encourage all students to take higher-level high school courses to prepare for college and careers."

Beginning with the freshman class of 2008-09, Louisiana will up the requirements for high school students and implement a more rigorous curriculum.

The freshman class of 2008-09 will be the first class to go into high school under the newly adopted LA Core 4. The curriculum has a more rigorous set of requirements and is considered to be college-preparatory.

A student may opt out of the curriculum only with parental permission following the second year in high school. Students who opt out will receive a regular high school diploma.

Students who remain in the program and graduate will receive a state diploma and automatically be accepted into any public college or university in Louisiana.

The curriculum change will be one of the first steps in implementing the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's high school redesign plan in an overall effort to lower the dropout rate and better prepare students for college and career.

In conjunction with the high school redesign plan, the state will move toward discontinuing the comprehensive exam in favor of end-of-course exams.

The state Education Department field-tested an end-of-course algebra exam in the spring. Starting in the fall, Louisiana will add seven more end-of-course exams: American history, biology, English I, English II, geometry, civics and free enterprise.

A recent study by the Southern Regional Education Board notes that "although statewide exams and high school graduation rates appear to be related, states that have high-stakes exams, whether comprehensive or end-of-course, have somewhat lower graduation rates than other states."

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