

Score disparity

Test shows gap in results of minority and white students

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Results of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills showed that, as a group, black students scored worse in all testing areas than any other ethnicity in the Rock Island/Milan School District.

The gap between the scores of white students and black students increase as they progress through the grades, according to the results.

Assistant superintendent of curriculum Jay Marino gave the results to the school board

Tuesday night in a computerized presentation. The results are based on scores from tests taken in November by third, sixth and eighth graders.

The ITBS is a standardized test that assesses a student's skill level in language, reading, math, social studies and science.

For the report, the district separated students by their ethnicity. The scores of each ethnic group were then averaged.

Districtwide, all third-graders, on average, scored at or above

their grade level in all areas. In language, reading and science, however, black students, on average, scored below grade level.

According to Mr. Marino, the gap between the test scores of black students and all other students tends to grow as they advance into higher grade levels.

Superintendent David Markward said the district is analyzing the scores before drawing any conclusions as to what causes the difference. "We want to clearly understand what we're talking about.

"Sometimes district averages can be misleading," Mr. Markward said, adding "it is clear, however, that there's an unacceptable disparity between the achievement of minority groups and other students. We are anxious to look at individual building results by ethnic group."

In sixth grade, ITBS scores show black students have the grade-equivalency of fifth-graders

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in all tested areas. Hispanic students are also performing between the fifth and sixth-grade level in language, reading and social studies, but scored at or above their grade level in math and science. On average, white sixth-graders in the district scored at the seventh-grade level in all tested subjects.

In eighth grade, the district's white and black students, on average, were separated by at least two grade levels in all areas of testing.

As a group, white students scored at a ninth-grade level, while blacks scored at seventh-grade levels.

As a group, Hispanic students scored at the eighth-grade level, except in language, where they scored at a seventh-grade level.

On average, eighth-graders district-wide — regardless of their ethnicity — performed at their grade level.

ITBS scores were also organized by how each school performed, but not analyzed by ethnicity. Mr. Markward said this will be analyzed in the future.

Four Rock Island schools received academic warnings from the state board of education last year — Hawthorne Irving, Lincoln and Grant Intensive Basic elementary schools and Edison Junior High — because fewer than 50 percent of their students met the state standard in the Illinois Standard Achievement Test in two consecutive years.

ITBS scores for those schools show students tested below their grade levels in many areas.

Mr. Markward said there

have been improvements in the scores of those schools over the last three years. He attributes those improvements to an increase in the district's awareness about the students' testing performance and to "on-site" experts training the staff.

"We've had a focused effort to more consistently apply effective instruction," he said.

Mr. Marino said third-grade students in nine schools showed improvement in their ITBS reading scores, while 10 schools improved math scores. "Those trends are very positive," he told the board.

However, third-graders at those schools on the warning list scored, on average, below their grade level. Frances Willard third-graders also performed at a lower grade level — except in math, where they scored at grade level.

Sixth-graders at Grant, Hawthorne-Irving, Lincoln and Frances Willard also scored, on average, below grade level in all areas, the report shows.

Earl Hanson and Horace Mann sixth-graders scored at a grade equivalency of seventh-grade students in all areas, except in social studies, where Horace Mann students scored at grade level.

Edison eighth-graders scored slightly below grade level in reading, but above grade level in all other areas.

"We still have a long way to go, but I think we're getting better at understanding the problem and starting to focus our resources," Mr. Markward said, adding that he would like to see that improvement "accelerated."

He also said a new mentoring program at Hawthorne-Irving is expected to help students there in language arts.

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