

4 R.I. schools on state watch list

■ A more comprehensive look at local school test scores will be published in Friday's Dispatch and Rock Island Argus.

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ROCK ISLAND — Four Rock Island schools were placed on a warning list by the Illinois State Board of Education Wednesday because fewer than 50 percent of their students meet state testing standards.

Edison Junior High School, Grant Intensive Basic, Hawthorne-Irving and Lincoln elementaries were placed on the warning list, the only Quad-Cities area schools cited by the state.

Rock Island school officials say they've been working to improve academics at the four schools since 1999, when the current state standardized test was introduced.

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The Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), which was taken in the spring, tests students in grades three, five and eight in reading, math and writing. Students in grades four and seven are tested in social studies and science.

Edison Junior High had 47.7 percent of its students meet or exceed state standards. Grant Intensive Basic had 23.41 percent, Hawthorne-Irving had 20.9 percent and Lincoln had 44.4 percent. Washington Junior High narrowly avoided being on the list with 50.7 percent meeting or exceeding the standard.

The district's average scores

among its 10 elementary and two junior high schools was 52.8 percent. At 84.9 percent, Eugene Field Elementary had the highest number of students at or above state standards.

Grant Intensive Basic was on the state's watch list three years ago before the ISAT became Illinois' standardized test. The state board gave schools a two-year grace period before producing a new watch list, Rock Island assistant superintendent of curriculum J. Jay Marino said.

Though some of schools have shown improvement since the test was first given in 1999, none placed on the watch list Wednesday have ever scored above the 50 percent level.

Mr. Marino said the district will have four years to bring the

test scores up and must work with the ISBE to produce a list of expectations they will achieve. If schools don't improve, they are subject to a variety of actions, including being shut-down by the state.

"There will be a performance agreement," he said, adding he does not expect the ISBE to close any Rock Island schools because of poor performance.

Mr. Marino said the district already has started working to improve the performance of the schools. This year the district received a \$3.2 million grant to help focus on improving reading and writing skills.

The district qualified for the grant because of its poor test scores. The grant pays for additional full-time staffers and read-

ing tutors.

The district also has four "master teachers" that are provided by the state to help students with reading at the four schools on the watch list. The teachers started in the district last year and have special training on how to teach reading.

Mr. Marino said there is a connection between the test score and the fact that they schools are in the low-income portion of Rock Island.

Mr. Marino said the schools that are excelling at the ISAT and the schools that aren't have the same district curriculum standards to follow and the same educational opportunities. In the schools that are failing those opportunities aren't being fully put to use, he said.