

Schools To Use End-Of-Year Testing Results To Gauge Pupil Improvement

BY SUSAN USHER

Brunswick County students won't be taking pre-tests this week as planned.

Instead, in an approach that won initial approval from the Brunswick County Board of Education Monday night, their performance on end-of-year tests this spring will be compared to last year's test results.

Assessing student performance is part of an effort to increase accountability by students, teachers and schools for what students learn during the course of a school year. The state end-of-year tests check to see how well students have mastered the state curriculum for their grade level. At one time, Brunswick County Schools had considered developing its own set of pre- and post-tests to use at the beginning and end of each school year.

The state has end-of-year tests in place for grades three through eight in most subject areas, with tests more aligned to the new state curriculum due out within the next several years for social studies and science.

"We believe this is a better way of collecting data on student performance," Assistant Superintendent Jan Calhoun told the board in announcing the change. "The state is doing some good things with assessment. As long as the state is doing well, then I think we need to hook onto that," he said.

Calhoun said choosing to use existing test results rather than developing new tests means accepting the idea that any changes in student performance from the end of one year and the start of the next school year are not significant.

On a new "developmental scale score" that allows tracking of student performance on the end-of-year tests from one year to the next, an increase of five points represents "average" progress for the year.

As soon as the work can be done, students' test results from last year will be "re-rostered," or broken down and regrouped by current class assignments. This will give teachers an idea of where their class started this year.

Additional information, such as how well students performed in relation to specific curriculum items, takes longer to reconstruct, but can be made available eventually, Calhoun said. "We just need to set aside the time to do it."

If class assignments are made earlier, as in late spring or early summer, some data could be in the hands of teachers before or when school begins each year.

"This will mean teachers can develop additional diagnostic tests to find out what students know and what they need to learn," targeting their teaching as needed. "This is not something we're going to do tomorrow. We're talking about a different way of teaching, a significant change, and change does not come easily. It requires support."

Calhoun said he hopes the staff reorganization plan he intends to present to the board by year's end will provide the kind of support needed.

"I think if we can get this extra tool to the

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—Jan Calhoun, Asst. Superintendent

teachers it would be marvelous," said board chairman Donna Baxter.

He said additional work is needed in devising assessment approaches for the high schools, where students take end-of-course tests in each subject, and for students in K-2 classes. In first and second grade, students are observed by teachers using a developmental skills checklist.

Calhoun said he thinks reservations about the use of subjective observation for assessment can be addressed by training teachers to insure consistency in what is looked for.

Mary Yates, president of the Brunswick County chapter of the North Carolina Association of Teachers, reminded the board that the association does not support use of test results as the only means of assessing student/teacher performance.

"Testing is only a part, a small part, of assessment," she said.

Some Schools Lack Books

Calhoun told the board steps are being taken to correct book problems in some county classrooms. Orders for most text and trade books were submitted last March, when "the total book allocation wasn't known, the assistant superintendent's post was vacant and the orders were not reviewed that closely."

As of Sept. 1, he said, the warehouseman advised that \$256,000 had been spent, with a \$20,000 shortfall and some books still awaiting order.

Usually the state allocation for books is supplemented with local funds, but this year \$70,000 for books was cut when the local budget had to be reduced.

To help offset the loss, Calhoun is returning some books for credit since some classes didn't materialize because of a lack of students, checking for books to borrow from other schools and systems; and putting into place safeguards to make sure a similar situation won't happen in the future. In addition, the schools have received additional money for books from the state.

"Unfortunately we are dependent on the state's ability to get them (books) out to us and I understand they are running about one month behind," he said. "It's no comfort, I know, but there are other school systems across the state in the same situation."

The shortage of some textbooks and trade books in certain classes doesn't fully explain why

every student doesn't take home a textbook in every subject, something parents may not understand.

"Our teachers are moving away from textbook strategies," said Calhoun, particularly in subjects such as science and literature. Literature classes may rely more on "trade" or student choice reading books, for instance.

His recommendations for preventing book shortages include registering students for classes earlier in the spring, making it more difficult for students to change advanced course selections, holding firm on book allocations to individual schools and adding local funds for book purchases back into the budget.

"It's been my experience that you can't operate the textbook account on what the state gives you. You have to supplement it with local funds," said Calhoun.

Other Business

In other business the board:

■ approved on second reading a policy limiting travel reimbursement to 25 cents a mile;

■ met behind closed doors before approving personnel actions (see related story this issue);

■ approved an amended budget resolution for 1993-94 that reflects the consent agreement reached with Brunswick County Commissioners. The budget will leave the school with a \$58,000 fund balance. Finance Director Rudi Connor said the Local Government Commission recommends, but does not require, a fund balance of 7 percent to 10 percent of the current expense and capital outlay budgets. For Brunswick County Schools that would be \$700,000 to \$1 million, noted board member Bill Fairley. "I wish the county commissioners were here and understood this," he said.

■ heard from Technology Director Gene Zuck on the status of computer installations, training and usage in the county schools. Student work station labs and teacher work stations have been set up in each school, linked to the school's computer information management system. So far 250 faculty and staff have received basic training, with 2 representatives of each school receiving seven days of training in application of specific software. The current emphasis is on continued training, planning, and exploring ways to make best advantage of the newly-installed systems.

■ heard from Assistant Superintendent Bill Turner that more improvement to air quality has been made at Lincoln Primary School by checking every duct and vent and equalizing air flow to all classrooms in one building. He said his staff will be checking and adjusting airflow in other classrooms and other schools, using equipment borrowed from the state. Efforts are also being made to clean and dry carpeting in the third grade pod and to dry the classrooms. School employees have also discontinued use of an air freshener that proved to be an irritant.

■ scheduled a special meeting Monday, Oct. 18, at 6:30 p.m. at the central office in Southport to discuss personnel and attorney/client matters.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Biotechnologist Visits School

Charles Lipari, a former biotechnologist with Schering and Plough pharmaceuticals, discussed his experiences in the development of antibiotics and in cancer research on Sept. 28 and 29 with the Shallotte Middle School career exploration students of David Holden. He also discussed applications of genetic research to agriculture, food processing, disease prevention and crime control. Shown above are Lipari (left) and students Likendrea Scott and Adam Girard.

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FROM FOUR MILE REEF U.S. Coast Guard Tows Pleasure Boat To Shore

A 20-foot pleasure boat was towed to shore by the U.S. Coast Guard last week after losing power off Lockwood Folly Inlet, BMCS J.D. Arndt, chief of the USCG Station Oak Island, reported Tuesday.

At about 12:15 p.m., the station received a call from the fishing boat "Hunter Lynne" reporting a boat disabled at the Four Mile Reef, Arndt said.

Because the boat was not equipped with a radio, the station did not issue a Marine Assistance Radio Broadcast to request assistance from commercial salvors. Instead, the station launched its 44-foot patrol boat, which located the stricken vessel and towed it to Capt. Pete's Marina in Holden Beach.

On Oct. 8 at about 9:30 a.m., the station was called from its group office in Atlantic Beach requesting Oak Island to make a communications check of the area marinas for help in locating a missing vessel.

This was in response to a "May Day" call heard in the Wrightsville Beach area the previous day.

Coast Guard vessels and the U.S. Marine Corps helicopter "Pedro" searched the area for two days with negative results, Arndt said. Action has been suspended pending further information.

Sunday evening at about 7 o'clock, the station was called by the vessel "Integrity" reporting that a red flare had been sighted on the Intracoastal Waterway near the Elizabeth River. The station launched its 21-foot inflatable fast-response boat to investigate.

The boat searched the entire area with negative results that night and again the next morning. The station received no overdue or missing persons reports, but continued to issue Urgent Marine Information Broadcasts.

Action has been suspended pending further information, Arndt said.

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