

Education

Basic skills weak in Texas

United Press International

AUSTIN — A \$1 million study by the Texas Education Agency shows students in Texas public schools demonstrate "distressingly low performance" on tests designed to measure mastery of basic reading and mathematics skills.

Achievement levels are particularly low among minorities and students in the state's seven largest school districts, educators said Friday. Test performance was noticeably lower among students in the largest urban districts and small rural districts. Suburban districts' students scored better than students in other city school and nonmetropolitan areas.

"We don't know the reasons why," said Charles Nix, associate commissioner for planning and accreditation. He said further study is needed to determine why certain groups score poorly and how education programs need to be changed to help them learn.

According to the study only 13 percent of sixth graders have 12 percent minimal math skills. For blacks the figure is 4 percent, for Mexican Americans 6 percent.

Among 11th graders, 32 percent demonstrate mastery of essential everyday mathematics skills such as the ability to add fractions or use a map scale to determine distances. For blacks the figure is 9 percent, for Mexican Americans 22 percent.

In reading, only 33 percent of sixth graders and 43 percent of 11th graders have mastered fundamental vocabulary and comprehension skills. Among blacks researchers reported 13 percent of sixth graders and 18 percent of 11th graders meet minimal skill levels. For Mexican Americans the figure was 21 percent and 22 percent respectively.

Researchers also found significant declines in scores of children who watch a lot of television, come from low income families, do not

speaking English at home or have access to few reading materials at home. Also, males scored poorer than females, especially among sixth graders.

Educators said further study is necessary to determine reasons for the difference and develop remedial programs to help students reach minimal skill levels.

Researchers tested 110,000 students at 2,234 schools in April and May for competency in skills judged essential by Texas educators and for comparison with performance of students in national tests scores.

Results of math and reading tests administered to 60,000 sixth and 11th graders were reported to the State Board of Education Friday. Scores on writing and citizenship tests will be announced Nov. 11.

"Texas students are achieving in mathematics and reading very nearly like their counterparts in the nation as a whole," Chairman Joe Kelly Butler of Houston said. "Some Texas students, like their counterparts in other states, are not achieving satisfactorily. Distressingly low performance of some students is present in all types of school districts."

Butler noted, however, that many Texas students are achieving above the national average, including students from all types of school districts across the state.

"This tells us that public school education in Texas is basically sound," Butler said.

Nix cautioned that the statistics represent general standings of students and are not intended to gauge the performance of individual school districts.

Education Commissioner M. L. Brockette said the so-called "essential objectives" measured in the tests represent skills Texas educators feel all students should achieve — not competencies aimed at college preparation.

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Public schools undermined

United Press International

CHICAGO — The most serious obstacle to good education in public schools is the large number of "functional illiterates" who graduate from colleges each year to become teachers, a leading educator says.

Max Rafferty, former superintendent of public instruction in California, said Friday many public school children are unable to read, write and do simple arithmetic, because their teachers are unable to teach the basics.

Speaking to 1,600 educators at the seventh annual convention of

the American Association of Christian Schools, he said a shift toward relevance and more liberal teaching methods in the last two decades has undermined the entire public education system.

Rafferty, now dean of the School of Education at Troy University in Alabama and the author of several books on basic education, said private schools offer a better basic education because parents have more input than in public schools.

Rafferty predicted it will be at least 12 years before public schools return to quality basic education.

"The push is starting now," he said. "But it takes 12 years to put a student through our schools."

World productivity called solution

Energy executive blasts president

A director of the U.S. National Committee World Energy Conference criticized the Carter administration's energy policy proposals here last week and painted a grim picture of future energy production in the United States.

Howard Boyd, chairman and chief policy officer of a multi-billion dollar energy corporation in Houston told a Texas A&M University audience that energy problems that will confront the nation in 10 years are his problems now.

He said productivity is the answer. Boyd, who deals extensively with worldwide energy for the El Paso Co., repeatedly took the Carter energy policy to task.

"The president's solution to the energy problem is suspect from the start," he said. It is dependent on conservation. Conservation is obviously good; on the other hand, economic stagnation is not suitable either.

"We must move forward with productivity," he said.

The success of the 1973 Arab oil embargo alerted the Arab nations to the power within their grasp, he said. Before the embargo, Bond said, no group on earth had had more trouble presenting a unified front.

But the Israeli situation crystallized the Arab goal, Boyd said.

"I don't know what the answer is, but the problem is not going to go away," the chairman said. "Just as important, though, is that the lead time puts any alternative years away."

For example, as long as 13 years may be needed to get a nuclear power plant on line, seven years to open a coal mine and nine years to

begin a liquefied natural gas operation in Algeria.

Boyd said the natural gas industry will not be the one to save the United States, either.

"How are we going to meet that demand? The Lord only knows," he said. "It won't come from natural gas."

In the last 10 years, the United States has consumed twice the amount of gas it has discovered, he said. LNG holds some potential, but environmental and regulatory agencies are slowing its use, the Houston executive said.

Boyd said regulation of the sale of

natural gas has created a demand load that gas industries cannot possibly meet.

Now more than half of America's population is somewhat dependent on natural gas for energy.

"Deregulation is coming," Boyd said. "Congress in the last 30 days has decided to deregulate gas."

"Well, that's commendable. But you just can't turn off the gas supply. The best you can do is phase it out."

Energy problems will be here for some time, he said; the most conservative estimates state that by the

year 2000, the energy demand will increase to 75 percent above its present level.

Boyd was at Texas A&M as part of the College Business Administration visiting executive speaker series.

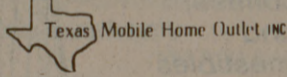
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