



Standardized tests assault misguided

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The campaign to lower Louisiana's school accountability standards appears to be heating up.

The standardized tests that measure students' knowledge have drawn criticism since their introduction in the state several years ago, but education officials say efforts to lower standards are becoming more organized and serious.

Brigitte Nieland, director of education for the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, said attacks on the rule that fourth- and eighth graders must pass the LEAP test for promotion are originating from "multiple fronts."

State Superintendent Paul Pastorek said more people are questioning the accountability standards than in a number of years.

"It is a product of people kind of forgetting why we went in that direction, and I also think it is people not realizing that we have experienced great success as a result," said Pastorek.

Officials say the anti-accountability push has included:

- An effort by East Baton Rouge public school leaders and others to count test scores from magnet schools for neighborhood schools those students would have otherwise attended.
- Attempts by state lawmakers to repeal or weaken LEAP standards.
- A request by several Northeast Louisiana legislators for public schools to offer "dual track" course work designed to help students who are not college bound.

Jim Brandt, president of the Public Affairs Research Council, acknowledged the threat despite the fact that the state's school accountability standards have earned national plaudits, including an "A" grade from Education Week magazine earlier this year.

All of this is disconcerting.

The last thing Louisiana's education system needs is a relaxing or elimination of accountability standards.

State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education member Chas Roemer may have summed up what's at stake when he said, "There is not a single instance in America that says when we lower standards we get higher results."

For decades, Louisiana's public education had no uniform standards for its schools, teachers and students. School accountability has addressed that with measurable success. To crawl back would be a monumental error that would send negative ripples through every segment of Louisiana's society.