

Students Beat CAT Average

Test Tougher; Scores Fell From Last Year

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Charlotte-Mecklenburg students scored above the national average this year on the revised California Achievement Test (CAT), but scores were lower than last year.

School officials had predicted scores would drop an average of 10 to 15 points because the new test incorporated more difficult material and imposed higher standards than the previous test, which was developed in 1978.

The scores, released at Tuesday's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education meeting, do not show a drop in achievement, said associate Supt. Chris Folk. The new tests are better, he said, because the questions more accurately gauge what today's students are learning.

Third graders scored 54 in reading, 64 in mathematics and 60 in language for a total score of 60. The national average is 50, which means 50% of the students taking the test would be expected to score lower than the average, and 50% should score higher.

In 1985, third graders scored 61 in reading, 68 in mathematics and 73 in language for an average total score of 69.

Sixth graders this year scored 53 in reading, 62 in mathematics and 60 in language, for a total score of 57. Last year, they averaged a total score of 69.

Eighth graders this year scored 49 — below the national average. They scored 52 in mathematics and 51 in language, for a total score of 51. Ninth graders took the test last year. They scored 61 in reading, and averaged a total score of 67.

In 1978, Charlotte-Mecklenburg students' total scores were below the national average. That year, third graders scored 45, sixth graders scored 47, and ninth graders scored 45.

In the past three to four years, Folk said, the scores have risen above the national average. Low reading scores in all tested grades, however, remain a concern.

Board Chairperson Carrie Winter said she is concerned that total scores are often higher in lower grades than in the eighth grade. "It would seem we're not able to maintain the momentum of learning maintained in the lower grades."

But low scores in higher grades does not reflect poor teaching, she said. In the next few weeks, each school will get a breakdown of its students' scores.

"Any real solution," she said, "depends on the schools and what they do with the scores."

In other business, the board got a report on violations of student behavior guidelines. This year, 277 students were excluded from school, compared to 227 last year. Possession of weapons on school grounds and vandalism remain the

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two main reasons for exclusion. More junior high school students were excluded this year than high school students. In the past, the number of exclusions in both age groups has been fairly even, school officials said. The increased exclusions are "basically discouraging," Winter said.

The guidelines drawn up in 1981, spell out punishments for eight violations.

The board swore in two members for four-year terms. They are incumbent Karen Gaddy and newly elected member Sharon Bynum, who defeated incumbent Arthur Griffin in the June runoff.

N.C. students did better on the California Achievement Test in May than state school officials expected, even though their scores fell by 9 or 10 percentile points.

"It's such good news, I can hardly contain myself," state school research director William Brown told a state Board of Education committee Monday in Asheville.

Brown credited the state's kindergarten and primary reading programs. He also said increased use of standardized tests has helped teachers identify students' weaknesses. "It's an absolute success story."

The Associated Press contributed to this article.