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Final numbers from R.I.'s ISAT scores still month away

By Robin J. Youngblood, ryoungblood@qconline.com.

The Rock Island-Milan School District is still waiting for official test results on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test its students took nearly nine months ago.

The school board heard the preliminary results at Tuesday's board meeting but won't know the status of its schools on the early warning and watch lists until mid-November, according to the Illinois State Board of Education.

"In order for data to be useful, it has to be timely," said Jay Marino, assistant superintendent of curriculum. "I think (the delay) is a symptom of the struggle the ISBE is facing."

The board underwent a recent overhaul when Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich replaced the Illinois school board and its superintendent.

To get off the lists that eventually put sanctions on underperforming schools, districts must meet three criteria under No Child Left Behind two successive years:

-- At least 40 percent of students in each of several sub-groups, including all students, black, white, Hispanic, low-income and disabled, must meet or exceed state learning standards in reading and math.

-- 95 percent of a school's students must take the test.

-- The school must have an 88 percent attendance rate.

Subgroups, like students with disabilities, consistently scored below 40 percent while the of the district's students mostly stayed above the cut-off.

"I realize we have certain problems," said board member Earl Strupp. "We are going to have to clean up a lot of simple things in our

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district."

Mr. Strupp, a former teacher, suggested using the staff to find good teaching strategies instead of paying for outside programs.

"Why can't we utilize the staff?" he asked. "I'd like to look within to see what we can do."

"We have high expectations for continued improvement and growth," Mr. Marino said. "The results that we see, we are not satisfied with. However there are incremental gains that also need to be celebrated."

Eighth-graders tested in writing achieved at least a 20 percentage point increase across every sub-group.


"It's important to note we had our highest achievement, even surpassing the state," he said.

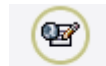
It seemed, Mr. Marino pointed out, that the longer students are in the district, the better they perform on the ISAT. "That validates the type of achievement that reflects the hard work of our teachers."

Even though progress was seen only in incremental gains, Mr. Marino said the progress the state and federal government expects takes time.

"We didn't get into this overnight," he cautioned. "There's no quick fix. The solutions we apply are long term solutions."

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9:00 p.m.	Evening at Pops "Richard Rodgers"	
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