

Students gear up for testing time

By JESSICA DYER

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Jasper High School juniors Jessica Berger, Alyssa Carrington and Emily Peters, all 16, need to pass the state's annual education assessment test to qualify for graduation in 2009.

All missed the passing mark on the math portion of the ISTEP+ last year by only a few points and must retake the test next week. To prepare, they've been working on math problems and studying with a school-provided tutor during study hall and in remediation classes.

"They told us we had to retake it and by how many points we missed it by," Berger said this morning. She was three points shy of passing the test.

The Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus, better known as the ISTEP+, will be administered all next week in Dubois County school districts for third-through 10th-graders.

Harold Schipp, curriculum director for Greater Jasper Consolidated Schools, said no one is allowed to make up missed parts of the test, in accordance with state law, but the test can be retaken in the spring semester.

Younger students who fail the mandatory two- or three-part assessment test don't retake it. Instead, they are given special attention in the needed area — math, language arts or science — the following year.

Only fifth- and seventh-graders are tested on science.

Southwest Dubois School Corp.'s test coordinator, Sheral Stanton, said each student in her district is given practice questions for at-home review. Worksheets are also available for free download from the Indiana Department of Education's Web site, she said.

"Parents can work on the ISTEP at home with their kids, if they want to," Stanton said. "I always make sure they have that information."

The Southwest corporation tested its middle-schoolers this week using the standardized, online Northwest Evaluation Association tests.

"It puts them in test mode," Stanton said.

Steve Scott, principal of Pine Ridge Elementary School, sends a note home with students with tips to help them test well. He particularly recommends parents make sure the student eats breakfast and gets plenty of sleep.

Scott, who is also ISTEP coordinator for the Southeast Dubois School Corp., said the schools provide a snack during breaks on test days.

Berger said she'll be going to bed early the night before so she's rested for the test.

Her friend Chyann Leal needs to pass the English portion of the test and will eat breakfast next week so she isn't hungry during testing. As a rule, the exam is administered in the morning because students are more alert.

"I always get hungry during that time," Leal, 16, said.

State- or school-provided help isn't the only avenue parents and students have in preparing for or recovering from the ISTEP.

Lee Boehm, director of the Sylvan Learning Center in Jasper, said parents are generally reactive rather than proactive when it comes to the ISTEP. When students bring home results in January, parents seek help from Sylvan, a tutoring program for students in kindergarten through grade 12.

"January is our busiest month," he said.

Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology student Jeremy Clarke, 21, runs an online ISTEP preparation company. The software engineer and computer science major started Sharper Results to give parents and teachers a way to help students review for the mandatory test. He's seen a slight jump in users of the Web-based program because the test weeks — the test can be given anytime between Sept. 17 and 28 — are approaching.

"Going through school myself, tests were always a burden," said Clarke, a graduate of Northridge High School in Middlebury. "It was always hard to know what to study."

The ISTEP was approved by the Indiana General Assembly in 1987 and administered to students for the first time in 1988. Sophomores taking the test in the fall of 2004 were the first required to pass the test to graduate.

Download free practice test materials at:
<http://www.doe.state.in.us/istep/publications.html>

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