

Diploma comes harder for Waterloo students

Exit exams become increasingly a trend in U.S. high schools

WATERLOO (AP) — High school students in one of the state's largest districts have to do more than make the grade in order to graduate. They have to pass an exit exam.

"We're making a dramatic departure from what we've been doing to say that we want that Waterloo diploma to mean something," Superintendent Arlis Swartzendruber said.

Students must score a 251 in both math and reading on the Iowa Tests of Educational Development. That represents the median nationally for the spring of eighth grade, Sharon Miller, a Waterloo schools spokeswoman, said Monday.

By the spring of senior year, just 28 percent of students nationwide score below that mark on reading and 30 percent below that mark on math, said Robert Forsyth, director of the ITED program at the University of Iowa.

Competency testing as a graduation requirement is becoming increasingly popular nationwide. Twenty-five states have or will soon have in place such tests.

C.R., Marion schools

Marion High School requires juniors whose reading or math scores on the ITED fall below

the 40th percentile to take a special remedial class or classes their senior year to graduate. The new requirement was adopted in September 1998.

The College Community school board in July voted to begin requiring students to earn a basic academic skills certificate as part of tougher graduation requirements. The requirement goes into effect with students entering the high school next fall.

In Cedar Rapids, students must earn a minimum of 285 credit hours and demonstrate technical competency to qualify for a diploma.

Linn-Mar High School Principal Jerry Van Dyke said Linn-Mar has no specific competency requirement, but noted that "analyzing skill and knowledge requirements for graduation is an ongoing process and needs to be a focal point of our school improvement process."

Waterloo services

In Waterloo, with three more chances to take the test before they are scheduled to graduate in 2001, 23 percent of the 506 juniors who took the test this fall still haven't met the minimum requirement.

The junior class was alerted to the new requirement as freshmen. Since then, the district has added tutoring services, two new classes and a summer program for those struggling in math and reading.

district officials said.

Nicole Myers, a junior at Waterloo East High School, said she became very nervous after she twice failed the requirement. She passed this fall.

"I was kind of stressed because I knew if I didn't get that 251, I wouldn't graduate," said Myers, 17, who has a 2.7 grade-point average. "I'm just not good at taking tests, even though I do well on my homework usually."

Nationwide, about 52 percent of freshmen given the battery of tests each spring score a 251 or better in reading, while 54 percent reach that score in math, Forsyth said. For seniors nationwide, 70 percent will reach that score in reading, while 69 percent will hit the mark in math.

Those numbers are higher in Iowa, where about 70 percent of Iowa freshmen score 251 or better in reading and 76 percent clear the bar in math, Forsyth said.

Tests criticized

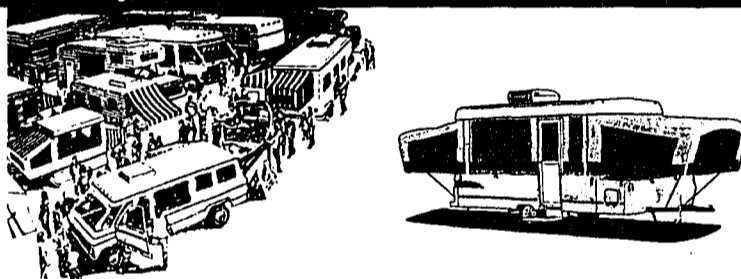
Some state education leaders said placing so much weight on one test isn't the best move, said state Department of Education spokesman Klark Jensen.

"They are sort of just plucking a test out of the air and saying you have to pass this," Jensen said. "Focusing more on what the kids are taking and what they do before they graduate seems to make more sense."

Wedding stories run Sunday

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Fatal accident in Davenport



AP photo

One driver died and four people were injured in a five-vehicle accident at the intersection of Kimberly Road and Wisconsin Avenue in Davenport on Monday. The accident happened at 8:23 a.m. when a car driven by Kristen Weaver, 32, of Davenport, ran a stop sign and collided with a school bus. The impact thrust the bus into the path of three vehicles in the opposite lane, including a Scott County sheriff's squad car. There were no children on the bus. Weaver was pronounced dead on arrival at a local hospital shortly after the crash.

BRIEFS

Keystone house burns

■ KEYSTONE — A rural Keystone residence sustained heavy damage from a fire at noon on Monday. Keystone firefighters responded to the blaze at the Mark Dvorak home on 15th Avenue after a passer-by noticed heavy smoke.

No one was home at the time.

The family lost many of its possessions, fire officials said.

The investigation continues.

Firefighter dies at scene

■ STORY CITY (AP) — A firefighter collapsed and died of a suspected heart attack on the scene of a small house fire.

Douglas Stevens, 42, was

among the 23 firefighters who responded to the fire Sunday evening. It started behind the fireplace and was contained within an hour.

During the fire, Stevens came out of the house and collapsed, said Fire Chief Scott Nibe.

Jury considers Tumey murder case

TIPTON — Jurors will try today for a second day to do what a jury couldn't do this fall: reach a verdict in the first-degree murder case of Dean Tumey.

Jurors deliberated most of Monday into the early evening before halting their work until 9 a.m. today.

Tumey, now 54, is charged with beating and strangling a Davenport 17-year-old, Sandra Jo Pittman, in September 1980 and leaving her dead body at a rest area along Highway 30 west of Clarence.

At the first trial, a Cedar County jury deadlocked, 7-5 for acquittal, on Oct. 1.

NOTICE

Due to limited availability, the Graco Pack N Play portable crib, Model No. 9046XT, advertised on page 8 of the Target advertising supplement for February 6, will not be available as advertised. We are unable to issue rain checks for this item. We regret any inconvenience this may have caused.



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