



Published October 20, 2007 10:41 pm - When the latest Adequate Yearly Progress results for the 2006 ISTEP+ tests were released this summer, Madison County school corporations saw mixed results.

## **DIRECTIONS: School systems work to improve ISTEP scores**

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When the latest Adequate Yearly Progress results for the 2006 ISTEP+ tests were released this summer, Madison County school corporations saw mixed results.

Some schools saw great progress, some regressed and others stayed the same. But what's apparent to leaders of school corporations is that AYP rankings have to improve.

Some school corporations are adding new software to aid in pinpointing where students are falling behind. The South Madison Community School Corp. has set out to have 90 percent of students passing in five years. So what are schools doing to improve results?



"There's no silver bullet out there," said Alexandria Superintendent Jim Willey. "What we do is we find what's best for our kids, and we try."

Alexandria and Elwood schools this year added STI Assessment, a classroom-based test system made by Software Technology Inc. The test, according to Willey, can be used as a micro assessment of what students are learning in a particular class. A teacher can administer a pre-test before beginning a new subject to find out what students know beforehand. And after the unit is taught, a post-test can be administered to pinpoint students' weaknesses in that subject.

"It's a constant measure of students' progress as they go," said Willey.

The STI Assessment model is tailored to Indiana state standards and can be used to figure out students' weaknesses not only in areas tested on the ISTEP+ test, but for anything else they are taught.

Jan Kaye, director of special services for Elwood schools, said that that school corporation is just beginning to train teachers on STI Assessment. Elwood hopes to implement the program by the end of the first semester, and will apply it to more than just improving ISTEP scores.

"We will use (STI Assessment) for ISTEP preparation, and teachers will use it to help construct tests and exams in their classes," said Kaye.

Ned Speicher, superintendent of Frankton-Lapel schools, said that STI Assessment has been in use there for a while. Frankton-Lapel also uses Skills Bank, another computer program, which reviews basic math skills. If students master 85 percent of the skills, they move on to a different level; if not, they are re-taught the material.

But Speicher said that the focus is not just on improving ISTEP scores, but improving students' skills in every area.

"Really, this is not just about ISTEP," said Speicher. "It's to improve every student's reading and math skills. The real focus is, you need to master these skills."

Dr. Bill Bolander, South Madison assistant superintendent, said that his corporation, which had about 80 percent of students passing ISTEP last year, has introduced a five-year plan to have 90 percent of students passing. South Madison has acquired the Fast Forward computer program,

which focuses on first grade students.

"(Fast Forward) is designed to improve brain function," said Bolander. "It strengthens neural pathways in specific areas related to oral language and reading development."

South Madison piloted the Fast Forward program last spring. First-graders targeted for improvement will receive lessons in the program in half-hour blocks made especially for them, said Bolander.

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