

JCPS scores

Several conclusions leap out about the Kentucky Core Content Tests that the state's public school students took last spring, and they point to significant progress in Jefferson County. There are frustrations as well, of course, but unfortunately some of them stem from schools being mired in an assessment system in which advancement sometimes seems not to matter.

» At the high school level, the percent of novice math and reading students dropped sharply, and the percentage of students with proficient and distinguished scores improved markedly. Indeed, 54.5 percent of JCPS high school students earned the two highest scores in math and 70 percent did so in reading. Would 100 percent be ideal? Absolutely. Are those the scores and strides forward of a "failing" system? Absolutely not.

» Each of the 21 JCPS high schools showed significant reading and math gains, especially those that have been labeled "persistently low achieving." Four high schools — Central, Pleasure Ridge Park, Shawnee and Western — will get "safe harbor" from state sanctions mandated under the federal No Child Left Behind law because they lowered the percentage of lowest scoring students by more than 10 points. Western,

often tagged as troubled, met all of its NCLB goals.

» The high school progress is attributable to a sophisticated and well-coordinated strategy devised by former Superintendent Sheldon Berman and his staff and laudably embraced by the Jefferson County Teachers Association. The school board seems loath to acknowledge Mr. Berman's achievements, but both it and new Superintendent Donna Hargens should build on what is working and fix only what is demonstrably broken.

» Middle schools showed progress, though not as dramatically as the high schools. Middle school years are difficult ones, both for children and for educators, but for starters the district should examine whether supervisors at that level are as strongly focused on innovative change as their high school peers.

» Finally, the results show the utter futility of state leadership audits that resulted in replacement or condemnation of principals who were in fact making commendable progress, and of a federal NCLB law that labels increasing numbers of schools failures even as they improve. State officials are right to seek waivers from NCLB. Meanwhile, JCPS has shown it can do without that sort of state and federal "help."