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Student Essays Are Read for Signs of Crisis

BATON ROUGE, La., May 17 (AP) — Essay tests taken by 50,000 high school sophomores in Louisiana are being read for signs of personal crisis like suicidal tendencies or child abuse.

The company grading the essay section of the statewide 10th-grade examination is flagging compositions that "need to be brought to someone's attention," Robert Schiller, Louisiana's Deputy Superintendent of Education, said Tuesday.

Papers that appear to reflect such crises will be sent by the Education Department to school districts, where officials will decide whether to intervene, Mr. Schiller said.

Critics of the plan said it was an inva-

sion of students' privacy, and they questioned whether those grading the essays were qualified to recognize psychological problems.

Protest Is Filed

Officials expect warning signs to appear in two-tenths of 1 percent of the tests, or about 100 students. The tests, which were given in April, are being graded now.

The supervisor of the state's school psychological services, Jim Canfield, has filed a protest memorandum calling the practice "immoral, unethical and probably illegal."

The state is required by law to get parental consent before using the

examinations to make psychological judgments, Mr. Canfield said.

"Their intent may be good, but there has to be prior consent," he said. "Parents don't know that this is happening, and if nothing else, they should be made aware."

Measurement Inc. of Greensboro, N.C., has hired 70 people to score the tests, most of whom have bachelor's degrees in English or education, said Rebecca Christian, assistant director of the Education Department's bureau of accountability.

The concern has done similar work for Mississippi, New Jersey, South Carolina and Texas.

Wendy Littlefair, project coordinator

at Measurement Inc., would not discuss the procedure.

The essays ask students to write about teen-age problems, a format that could give students a chance to express suicidal tendencies, instances of child abuse or other problems, Ms. Christian said.

Mr. Schiller said the evaluation was legal and part of the state's "moral obligation to protect youngsters."

The School Superintendent of the East Baton Rouge Parish, Bernard Weiss, a former English teacher, said he had "serious concerns about having the background to make such an assertion about a child."

"I certainly don't feel an English teacher is basically qualified to make that kind of determination," he said.