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Push reaps some higher MEAP scores

By MARIE CHESTNEY
STAFF WRITER

Clarenceville School District educators are happy with the higher scores the district's elementary and middle school students earned on the 1994 Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests.

It's the scores earned by high schoolers, especially on the math test, that leave them concerned.

Next fall, 11th-graders statewide will no longer take the MEAP tests. Instead, they will take new proficiency tests in science, math and reading which educators say will be even more difficult than MEAP.

"They're going to be tough," said Superintendent David Kamish Thursday during a Clarenceville Board of Education discus-

CLARENCEVILLE SCHOOLS

sion of the 1994 initial MEAP results. "We can either get with it, or it will be a big embarrassment again."

The Clarenceville district includes a portion of Farmington Hills.

Clarenceville has worked long and hard to boost its scores ever since Kamish and the trustees made the tests the district's number-one priority in 1992. They did so because of what they called embarrassingly low scores earned by students at all three grade levels.

For students at Botsford and Grandview elementary and at Clarenceville Middle School, the big push has been well-rewarded.

At the two elementarys, math scores between 1992-94 have jumped 40 percent; reading, 23.8 percent; and science, 20.5 percent.

At Clarenceville Middle, math scores between 1992-94 have jumped 16.5 percent; reading, 6.2 percent; and science, 38.7 percent.

But Clarenceville High students still struggle with the tests, especially the math test. Between 1992-94, math scores have risen 5.5 percent; reading, 1.9 percent; and science, 12.4 percent.

On the 1994 math test, only 29.9 percent of the students passed the math tests; 43 percent passed reading; and 57.4 percent the science test.

These results caught the eye of

the trustees Thursday and generated the bulk of the talk about the tests.

"Twenty-nine point nine percent doesn't bode well for when they take the math proficiency test," said Clarenceville High principal David Simowski.

"The wheels are already turning" to boost those scores, Kamish said.

One option discussed is a remedial math class, taken by high schoolers not ready for pre-algebra.

"We don't need a short-term fix, but a long-term fix," Simowski said. "Working intensively after school with them just doesn't work."

Right now, Simowski is trying to figure how to help about 25 10th-graders in a pre-algebra course who are failing the course.

These are students, he said, who should never have enrolled in the class, the lowest math class at Clarenceville High.

Administrators agree that the problem starts in middle school, where students don't achieve the needed math skills and then have no other alternative in high school than the pre-algebra course.

"We have 25 or so who are failing?" asked Vernice Dunkles. "There's something wrong when that large a number needs less than a pre-algebra course. That's a high number."

Simowski said students are "missing the boat" in middle school and still being recommended for pre-algebra.

In January, he said he will seek the board's approval for a remedial math class.

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will be made, Maxfield said.

"There's some people who say that they don't pay attention to these scores, but of course, they pay attention to it," Maxfield said.

For example, there are six years of reading results to compare.

Overall picture

This year, the district experienced a decline at every grade level in the percentage of those achieving the satisfactory category, according to the report. For grades four, the decline is 4.9 percentage points, at grade seven, 4.3 and at grade 10, 2.6.

While the change is not considered significant, the report suggests reading scores need closer look before drawing any conclusions.

Of fourth-grade students, 56.1 percent reached the satisfactory level, down from 61.0 last year, but up from 54.6 percent in 1992-93. Of seventh-grade students, 60.3 percent scored satisfactory this year, down from 54.6 percent last year, but up from 48.8 percent in 1992-93.

At the 10th grade level, those reaching the satisfactory mark were 57.8 percent, down from 60.4 percent last year, but up slightly from 57.3 percent in 1992-93.

In math, which has been an area of concentration in past years, the 1994 scores have increased over 1993 in grade four. In grade seven, there is a slight decrease of 2.6 percent reaching the satisfactory mark; at grade 10 there is a "significant increase" of 8.7 percent.

The four-year trend suggests improvement.

In fourth grade, 75.9 percent scored satisfactory in the math portion, up from 71.2 percent last year and up from 63.8 percent in 1992-93.

In seventh grade, 63.5 percent scored satisfactory in math, down from 66.1 percent, but up from 56.6 percent in 1992-93. At the 10th grade level, 50.0 percent reached the satisfactory level, up from 41.3 percent last year and 42.6 percent in 1992-93.

Science numbers

Unlike math and reading, the science assessment test is based on Michigan's older science curriculum of basic skills rather than the new and more rigorous essential skills curriculum, school officials said.

Farmington student performance at grade five shows a slight increase of 7 percent. Eighth-graders registered a slight decline of 2.3 percent scoring satisfactory. At grade 11, there is a significant increase of 6.3.

Overall, the six-year trend is stable, school officials said.

Of fifth-grade students, 88.6 percent scored satisfactory this year, up from 87.9 percent last year and the same amount (88.6) percent in 1992-93.

Eighth-graders reaching the satisfactory level were 71.0 percent, down from 73.3 percent, last year and the exact same amount in 1992-93. Eleventh-graders scored statistically higher this year at 60.4 percent, up from 61.1 percent last year and up from 60.5 percent in 1992-93.

But school board member Jack Inch, called the entire MEAP process "a lot of bunk" at a recent study session.

"It's a curriculum driver," said Inch, an economics professor at Oakland County Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus. "I've been concerned with this for 16 years."

Inch would prefer year-by-year assessments. Many variables come into play when testing, he said.

Sometimes there are groups of extra bright students or those who are non-motivated, "non performers." The MEAP doesn't assess how long the student has been with the district, either, he said.

"Also, some students look at the MEAP and ask 'What does this do for me?'" Inch said.

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