

### Write away Test enhances essay skills

For an exam given in March during the last school year, there is certainly a lot of consternation and head scratching over results from the first-ever state High School Proficiency Test administered to juniors.

As reported in the Farmington Observer Oct. 7, some school trustees are perturbed over — understandably — lateness in getting results back, lack of available individual data, and the subjective nature involved in grading written exams.

Oh, and yes, there seems to be a few raised eyebrows over the less than sterling performance on the test.

In Oakland County, the Farmington district still placed fourth in science and writing and sixth in math and reading, which is not a bad showing among the Bloomfields, Birmingham, Troy and Rochester.

Trustees and district officials are concerned, and rightly so.

Mediocrity doesn't mesh with a machine running on excess of \$100 million annually. Taxpayers want and deserve better results.

And didn't some students who took the exam openly crow in the Farmington Observer in March about how the new test was a breeze and even suggested it was a waste of time?

Apparently not. If anything, the results underscore the need for such a test, which requires students to utilize their writing and reasoning skills instead of only filling in squares on multiple choice questions.

Essay questions offer preparation for collegiate examinations. Those of the more than 90 percent of Farmington students who go onto college will soon become acquainted with the anxiety of blank pages of blue book staring back at them.

State education folks have time to work out the kinks in the proficiency test.

And Farmington schools officials vow better numbers next time; We believe them.

When MEAP reading scores dipped at some of the district's elementary schools two years ago, assistant superintendent for Instruction Judy White promised immediate results. Next year, reading scores jumped.

In the meantime, though, the district could encourage more outlets for students to enhance their writing skills.

Farmington Optimists, Daughters of the American Revolution and the PTA with its annual Reflections program all sponsor essay contests.

Winning entries in these contests are often excellent and demonstrate the talent that is there when it's tapped.

These commendable efforts should be expanded, especially within the Farmington schools.

It would be beneficial for students if district officials put the same verve into promoting writing as it does diversity, community service and conflict resolution issues.

They would be wise to do so ... and write away.

### Re-elect L. Brooks Patterson

Critics blast L. Brooks Patterson for moving away from his conservative roots by supporting tax increases for Oakland Community College and the SMART bus system, both of which voters approved, during his first four-year term as Oakland County Executive. What actually happened? The Christian Coalition re-defined what it means to be on the right of the political spectrum.

Gregarious and witty, Patterson is Mr. Ambassador for Oakland County, home to 1.1-million people. Fate put him in the Executive's chair during Oakland's boom years. But the Waterford resident has worked hard to reinforce Oakland as a global marketplace.

We're impressed with the results and spunk of his opponent, Democrat Edward Hamilton, 53, of Troy, a new-vehicle launch manager at Chrysler Corp. in Auburn Hills. But L. Brooks Patterson, 57, unquestionably deserves re-election as Oakland County Executive in the Nov. 6 general election. The job pays \$117,792 a year.

Patterson has his finger on the county's pulse as underscored by his easy primary victory over Timothy Hughes of Rochester Hills, who campaigned on an ultra-conservative theme stressing more government accountability and lower taxes. Patterson is a master at parlaying his personality into endorsements and ultimately votes. But he also has built a track record of success while administering a budget of \$560 million and a county work force of 4,100.

Patterson was fortunate to find his first term coinciding with an economic avalanche in the construction industry, in the retail sector, and in industrial and office development. But his Business Roundtable, which includes representation from the education community, produced economic support services like the One Stop Shop and Export Assistance Center. His initiatives also invigorated Oakland's

trade relations with Mexico.

Hamilton bills himself a high-tech Democrat but Patterson has made computer innovations a priority — for example, warrant teleconferencing, computerized base maps and remote electronic access of county information.

After taking office in 1993, Patterson avoided a budget shortfall through aggressive fiscal restraint, including position cuts, retirement incentives, privatized services, a department merger, and a hiring and wage freeze.

He made a commitment to reach out to older communities and followed through by appointing a county liaison, Jean Chamberlain, to south Oakland. The Woodward Avenue Corridor Structure Plan, unveiled this past summer, is a byproduct of the Woodward Avenue Corridor Study, which Patterson lent credibility to with his support.

Patterson taps his campaign war chest to the tune of \$25,000 each year to fund an employee suggestion program and award prizes for the best ideas to save county tax dollars. His 1996-97 budget proposal calls for a one-year, one-tenth-of-a-mill reduction in the county tax rate. He'd do well to heed Hamilton's call for county government to bring a bigger return per dollar spent.

Patterson is spearheading a countywide equity task force aimed at bringing more state tax dollars back to Oakland County, especially for road construction and mental health care, but he needs to lobby lawmakers more vigorously. He's developing international video teleconferencing to help match local businesses with potential foreign partners. And he's asking tough questions about how casino gambling in Detroit would affect Oakland's entertainment industry.

Patterson also has a big heart: he's the founder of the Rainbow Connection, a popular charity that grants wishes for terminally ill kids.

Re-elect L. Brooks Patterson on Nov. 6th.

#### TURNING BACK THE PAGES

This week in history as reported in past editions of the Farmington Observer and the Farmington Enterprise.

■ 40 YEARS AGO — OCT. 11, 1956 (ENTERPRISE)

The Eagle Elementary Parent Teacher Association held its first "get acquainted" meeting of the year, but organizers were pleasantly surprised when 119 people showed up.

Farmington High was selected as one of 500 schools nationwide to participate in the Foreign Relations Project by the North Central Association.

■ 25 YEARS AGO — OCT. 9-10, 1971 (ENTERPRISE & OBSERVER)

A site plan for a Chatham shopping center on 11 Mile and Middlebelt was resubmitted to the Farmington Township Planning Commission.

After two strikes and uncounted hours around the bargaining table, a two-year contract was reached between the faculty and administration at Oakland Community College Orchard Ridge. Faculty members received \$200 pay increase the first year and \$100 the second year with a \$100 inflation adjustment.

■ 2 YEARS AGO — OCT. 10, 1994 (OBSERVER)

Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Rudy Nichols ruled against an injunction to stop the 92-acre Timbercrest development project at 12 Mile and Middlebelt roads.

#### COMMUNITY VOICE

**QUESTION:**  
What's your dream vacation?



I'd like to go to Israel, take my three boys and live on a Kibbutz.  
Judy Shapiro  
Farmington Hills



Hanging out on a beach.  
Kerry Lafer  
Farmington Hills



I'd like to sail the Mediterranean.  
Rick Halberg  
Farmington Hills



Unlimited amount of days until I can relax and then some more after that.  
Karen Halberg  
Farmington Hills

We asked this question at a North Farmington High School soccer match.

#### LETTERS

##### Yea, Republicans!

It's unfortunate that Tim Richard, a political commentator I usually regard as one of the more insightful in Lansing, has made it a habit to trash the many positive education reforms that state legislative Republicans have enacted on behalf of parents recently.

In a recent (Observer, Aug. 29) column, Richard cynically chides Republicans as being misguided in their reasons for passing the new "schools of choice" law. Richard claims that most parents who choose a school outside their district do so for convenience rather than for the better education available at the school.

While this may or may not be the case (and who are we to fault parents who make that choice so they can spend more time with their child), Richard then makes a giant leap in arguing that schools of choice will not create competition between schools, and therefore will not improve education in the process.

While he goes on to cite several examples of parents who have chosen other schools for various reasons, Richard simply cannot use these examples to "prove" that parents do not want more competition in our schools.

Could it be that Mr. Richard doesn't know about the more than 10,000 students statewide who have "made the choice" to attend new public school academies this year rather than their local district school — double the number that chose public academies last year?

These students and their parents made this decision not because they are closer to where their parents work or because their parents have social contacts there, but because they are searching for a new, more innovative approach to education.

I might add that according to Central Michigan University (a leader in the public academy field) half of those, 10,000 students are minorities. It would not be a stretch to conclude that many of those couldn't afford to attend a private school like so many of us in Farmington Hills can, but now finally have a choice because of the new law.

It was the Republican Party, not the Democrats, who provided these poor (mainly inner city) students and their parents with the education they wanted.

The bottom line is that we, taxpayers and parents, foot the bill for the school system and deserve more choices than we have gotten in the past.

Robert D. Dorigo Jones,  
Farmington Hills

##### Farmington Hills: Big Success

We are very pleased to report that the Farmington Hills Police Department Benevolent Association's second annual golf outing

was an overwhelming success.

Due in great part to the Observer's generous contribution and support we were able to net in excess of \$50,000 to assist the families of public safety employees, and others with some immediate needs.

We feel great pride in counting you among our staunch supporters and offer you our personal and heartfelt thanks as we look forward to next year.

Honorable Frederick L. Harris,  
47th District Court  
John P. Ginopolis,  
Ginopolis on the Grill  
William J. Dwyer,  
Hills police chief

##### Seconds the motion

I'd like to second the suggestion of Kerrie Saunders in a recent (Aug. 29) letter to name a Farmington School for Marinus VanAmeeyde, who served as superintendent from 1957-76, when it was the fastest growing school district in the state of Michigan.

He steered it at a very challenging time and was well-regarded by parents and students alike. As I recall, he retired early because of a heart condition. It would be a fitting to recognize his contribution to the community by naming a school for him.

As Ms. Saunders points out, several other school buildings in the district are named for former superintendents: Harrison High School, O.E. Dunckel Middle School and Schulman Administration Building.

Margaret G. Schaeffer,  
Farmington Hills

##### 'Maxed' out

We thought you might be interested in our latest "Top Ten Pet Names" list.

These are the most popular names of over 5,000 patients with the number one name "Max" far outnumbering the others (80 pets named Max, the next closest was Sam at 43).

Top 10 names: Max, Sam, Bailey, Shadow, Molly, Casey, Buddy, Brandy, Murphy and Nicky.

Karen Micallef,  
Plaza Veterinary,  
Farmington

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington Michigan 48335. Or they can be faxed to 810-477-9722.

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— Philip Power