

POINTS OF VIEW

Standardized exams not true test of abilities

Would you rather be a Jack of all trades and master of none, or a master of one and not very good at anything else?

That's an age-old question that never seems to get answered. And it's one that comes to mind with the recently announced scores from the new High School Proficiency Test administered last spring to 11th-graders throughout Michigan.

What does it mean, anyway, to be "proficient" at something? Does it mean you're very good and maybe can make a living at it?

If you can replace a light switch but not rewire the whole house, you surely aren't a proficient electrician, but does that make you incompetent?

It may have taken you three hours before you finally fixed that leaky plumbing in the bathroom. Are you a proficient plumber? Heck, no, although you may be proficient at saving money and able to solve a problem that wasn't your expertise.

Yet some in the public view stu-

dents who didn't reach "proficient" levels in the reading, writing, math and science HSPST as failures. They don't see the second level, "novice," as anything more than mediocrity.

The only failures, as I see it, are those who didn't have enough ability to register in the "novice" category. Even those, however, aren't yet failures, but rather under-achievers who need more attention.

It is well and good to get a handle on who needs what help in which subjects. But it's not good to pigeonhole students as successes or failures based strictly on what they did in one grueling test over several days and taking some 11 hours.

If adults took those tests they'd be hard-pressed to earn a proficient rating in more than one or two subjects. Adults tend to forget how tough it was in school once ago: how their hands used to sweat before even a simple test on a book chapter; and how they worried what their parents would say, or do, if they didn't get a good grade.



LARRY PALADINO

How many people don't hit stride until long beyond their high school years? Often men and women "kick in" much later in life, after years of real-life experiences. Sometimes, of course, they never kick in. But all the teaching in the world isn't going to do any good to some people, just like others seem to pick things up almost by osmosis — you know, those honor-roll types who were the first to raise their hands and the first to finish a test.

Some kids have the right genes. Some have the work ethic. Some have all the advantages of a good home life.

But some have almost nothing in their favor and are destined to spend a lifetime spinning their wheels.

We might want Martha Stewart to decorate our house for the holidays, but do we want to watch her playing cornerback for the Detroit Lions?

With the proficiency test, though, it's as if we believe all the students who take it should attain the proficient level in all the subjects.

Leonardo da Vinci was the epitome of the Universal Man of the Renaissance. In today's parlance we would say, "He could do it all." But universal in virtually everything they do, are few and far between.

There are individuals who excel in their scope of endeavor. Michael Jordan is as good a basketball player as there's ever been and is such a good athlete he played AA baseball for a while. But was he not "proficient" because he wasn't a major leaguer?

If you're like most people, you had your good subjects and your bad in

school. If you were good at reading and writing, it didn't mean you could tell Pythagoras' theorem from a loaf of bread, or Newton's second law of physics from a Macintosh apple.

Complicating the HSPST results, just as in the MEAPs, are the countless variables that affect students: do they have good parents (or any parents, for that matter)?; can they speak English very well?; do they eat right?; have to help support their family?

There certainly are students who don't try; ones who don't study; and some who maybe haven't had very good teachers. And there are over-achievers who make the honor roll from sheer determination, maybe even brought about by teachers who somehow pulled out the best in them.

Unless kids have been cloned, they'll remain individuals destined to be specialists in some things and novices in others. We need to understand that.

Larry Paladino is an Observer & Eccentric staff reporter.

LCC bets against bowler's \$1 mystery game, and loses

Among bowlers, Gov. John Engler's stock is soaring from subterranean to stratospheric.

Or, in bowler lingo, the Liquor Control Commission threw a gutter ball, and Engler responded with a strike.

Detroit media may wallow in the miseries of the Tigers and Lions and their attempts to raid the treasury to build new stadiums. Parents may cheer lustily at kids' baseball, football and soccer games. Unseen investors may urge support for Detroit casinos.

But in this metro area, with more sanctioned bowlers than any place in America, the big story is LCC's crack-down on one-buck games played at bowling lanes.

In the mystery game, you put \$1 in the pot, and someone draws a number. If the number was your score in the previous game, you win. In another, a name is drawn and everyone stares as that poor soul tries to throw a strike and win the pot; if he or she

misses, the pot grows.

Illegal, said the LCC, which is important because most bowling centers have liquor licenses.

Bloody murder! said the bowlers, at first blaming Engler because he appoints the LCC.

"When I saw this," said Engler, "my first reaction was 'You've got to be kidding.' My second reaction was 'Oh, my God, it's true.'"

The governor said such games are enshrined "in custom and practice. They're the equivalent of church basement bingo," said Engler.

Although he professes to be "a damn poor bowler, I've spent a lot of time campaigning in bowling alleys."

Here is government's response to the too literal interpretation of Michigan's gaming, liquor and penal codes:

• Engler asked the LCC and the Lottery Commission to review the laws to see if an administrative solution could be found without bothering



TIM RICHARD

the Legislature. That's the fastest, cheapest solution.

• Bowlers provided 250,000 petition signatures — in five days! The signers supported House Bill 6114 by Rep. Dave Jaye, R-Utica, to exempt friendly bowling center games from the gambling laws.

Rep. Deborah Whyman, R-Canton, a co-sponsor, did yeoman service getting the petitions circulated. Observer bowling writer Al

("Ten Pin Alley") Harrison wrote a column that made the bulletin boards of many bowling centers.

On the last day of the September session, the House Regulatory Committee, chaired by Rep. Susan Munsell, R-Howell, reported the bill out of committee and sent it to the House floor. Munsell and friends took testimony, but it was unnecessary because the members had their minds made up in favor. There wasn't even a partisan glitch.

There is, however, a five-day rule before the full chamber can take up a bill. Speaker Paul Hillelegonds was unable to get the rule waived. So HB 6114 can't be taken up until about the third week of November, when the lame duck House returns to clean up its calendar.

Then the bill must go to the Senate, where the same process of reading in, sending to committee, report-

ing out of committee and voting on the Senate floor must be repeated.

Engler said he'll sign it. Al Harrison and I have witnessed.

There is one other little catch: An enacted law doesn't take effect until 90 days after the Legislature adjourns for the year, or about April 1. Bowlers don't want to wait. So if each chamber gives the bill a two-thirds vote for "immediate effect," HB 6114 will become law before the end of the year.

For bowlers, it will be a wonderful Christmas present.

Myself, I expect to be on an ice-covered Livingston County lake with a fishing rod in one hand and a warming beverage in the other. Despite the enthusiasm millions have for bowling, I find braving the north wind's blasts in December good for the soul.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events.

Winning stadium, casino gaming proposals might benefit Detroit

One of the worst days of my life was in July 1967, when I sat on the balcony of my apartment in Livonia and watched the eastern sky turn red as Detroit writhed and burned.

Those awful days were followed by the too-long reign of Coleman A. Young, the mayor who conveyed the impression that white folks in general and the business community in particular were unwelcome in Michigan's largest city.

What was important about Dennis Archer's campaign for mayor in 1993 was his insistence that Detroit could turn around only through politics that built links between the races and a leadership that reached out to businesses.

The theme resonated widely, from suburban folks who had grown up in Detroit and still had fond memories of their old hometown to business people who realized Michigan could not prosper if its largest city withered.

And the news from Detroit, especially in recent months, has been very, very good.

The business community has been led by the Big Three, who found in the Archer administration a climate that allowed them to realize that in addition to being global corporations, they were also citizens of Detroit.

GM bought the Renaissance Center for office space, thereby planting its footprint firmly downtown, and then negotiated a brilliant trade of the old City-County Building for its former headquarters on Grand Boulevard.

The Greater Downtown Partnership began to put private investment capital into downtown real estate around the old Hudson's store.

And over the weekend, the city announced a \$250 million facelift for its disgraceful public housing program by requiring future residents to take job training, education and home ownership programs.

On the ballot this fall are two more significant pieces in the rebirth of Detroit.

Proposal S on the Wayne County ballot seeks to raise \$240 million in taxes to help finance new stadiums for the Detroit Lions and Tigers. The measure adds 1 percent to hotel bills (now taxed at 14 percent) and 2 percent to rental car bills (now taxed at 6 percent) across the county.

Two decent and able men, former U.S. Rep. Carl Pursell of Plymouth and Ford retiree Harry Greenleaf of Livonia, are leading the charge against Proposal S. They argue that Detroit and Wayne County don't need any more



PHILIP POWER

taxes, especially since the revenues from S would amount to a public subsidy for two prodigiously wealthy families, the Ilitches (Tigers) and the Ford (Lions).

That's true. But.

Although I personally dislike it, the accepted method "du jour" for revitalizing decayed core cities — Cleveland and Baltimore are two reigning examples — is to make them destinations for people interested in sports and entertainment. And while the case for Proposal S may not be logically strong, it is emotionally compelling to people who wish Detroit well.

Same holds for state Proposal E, which asks all Michigan voters if it's OK to build three gambling casinos in Detroit.

The theory is that the casinos would create thousands of relatively low-skill jobs and put something like \$1 million daily into the Detroit economy. Casino income would be taxed at 18 percent, with 55 percent going to fund anti-crime programs in Detroit and the other 45 percent going to Michigan public schools statewide.

I don't gamble. For those who do, gambling is a terribly regressive tax. And gambling brings criminals, the mob and other low life.

It's true. But.

The gambling money is already going across the river to Windsor, and just maybe casinos would help contribute to the critical mass now building to turn Detroit around.

Emotion versus logic. It's a tough choice we'll make come Nov. 5. I'm still ambivalent, but just now I'm leaning toward the emotion.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, ext. 1880.



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