

MEAP dive

Test is among our few yardsticks

Not enough peaks, too many valleys. That's how we would describe the results of the Farmington Public School District's all-important results on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests.

Overall, the district's scores took a dive in all four areas announced earlier this month: 4th grade math and reading, and 7th grade math and reading were all lower for 1996 than the previous year's scores. Individual school scores — displayed on a school-by-school basis in Monday's paper — showed some consistent scores, with some huge swings of improvement and decline.

From those scores, we can offer congratulations to Forest Elementary where all 100 percent of the fourth graders hit the proficient mark for math — which is 26 percent higher than last year's score.

That means each fourth grader "passed" the math test by getting at least three-quarters of the answers right. Those same Forest fourth graders improved the school's math tally almost 40 percentage points from 48 percent passing in 1995 to almost 88 percent passing in 1996 in math. Big gains were also recorded by students at Kenbrook Elementary, while scores stayed high at Highmeadow.

On the flip side, scores plunged at Lanigan, Wood Creek, Eagle and Warner Middle when this year's scores are compared with last year. As they should be, administrators are duly concerned: "... nobody is whining, no one is complaining; no one is making excuses. The answer is we can do better," said Superintendent Bob Maxfield after the overall scores were announced.

We all know school officials discourage comparing those scores between years or between schools. Among the reasons: They're different students, with different life experiences and parents; some test better than others; and the test may be tougher or easier than last year and given earlier or later than last year.

Another problem is that the MEAP scores

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only tell us the number of students who met the 75 percent threshold. If many Forest fourth graders, for example, were bunched around 74 percent correct last year but this year's group improved on just a couple questions, the gain would look gigantic by pushing many students over the hump into the passing group. But it would actually mark very little improvement.

We expect school officials will put this year's MEAP results to good use, finding ways to improve what students are taught so that more of them can reach the level of proficiency required by employers, colleges or universities.

We would also join the superintendent in hoping to see all of Farmington's MEAP scores get better. But we're also hoping the tests and process improve, too. Some ideas include:

■ More detail in a school's scores, such as a bell curve or bar graph showing the numbers of students per school who scored in various ranges, to give parents more comparative information.

■ Better assurance that schools don't or can't "teach the test" to inflate a school's scores.

■ Improved consistency on the timing and difficulty of the tests so that scores actually come closer to showing how well one group of kids can read or do math compared to previous years.

With all its shortcomings, the MEAP is one of the few real measuring sticks that parents, taxpayers and this newspaper can hold up next to its school districts to ask the eternal question: How are our schools really doing in teaching our kids?

Overall, this year's short answer in Farmington is: They're not doing as well as they have in the past.

■ Three days from today, our Sunday newspaper will debut. Publication date aside, it will be the reliable paper you've come to expect of us.

weekend.

■ We're retooling our employment section to reach a broader audience. Ours is a career-driven market, and in today's world, an individual's career is second only to family in importance.

■ More advertising means the newspaper will physically grow in size, giving the editorial department more space for more local news.

Our goal is to have all this done for our customers on carrier service by 8 o'clock Sunday morning. Ask anyone in the distribution business, and they'll tell you that distributing 160,000 (our combined circulation) of anything in less than a third of a day is no small task.

Nevertheless, 8 a.m. Sunday it is. If you don't have your paper by that time, please call customer service at (810) 901-4716. Beginning this weekend, our customer service representatives work Sunday mornings, and their job is to get you your paper before your coffee gets cold.

We know the phrase is a bit overused, but we really do want to know what you think of our Sunday paper. You can call customer service, or Dave Varga, editor of the Farmington Observer, at 747-5450.

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

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

40 YEARS AGO — JAN. 31, 1957 (ENTERPRISE)
Officials of the Farmington City-Township District Library Board announced that more than \$2,000 in donations had been received from residents toward construction of a new library building.
Officials C. Goddard Smith and Edward Moseman said the group wasn't referring to the collections as a "drive." "We are leaving it up to the citizens of Farmington City and Township as to what size library they want, as evidenced by the contributions they make," Moseman stated.

25 YEARS AGO — JAN. 29-30, 1972
The state boundary commission approved a

cityhood election for Farmington Township for that spring, with all the township's five parcels and the Village of Quakertown included in the election. Township officials asked to exclude the parcels, while Quakertown asked to be excluded so it could petition to become a fifth-class city.

2 YEARS AGO — JAN. 30, 1995
Two East Middle School teachers — science teacher Marilyn Greenstein and math instructor Barbara Gluskin McCune — were among a select group nationwide to be certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. They went through 11 hours of essay exams, classroom visits and 160 hours compiling a portfolio.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Who is your hero?

We asked this question at Farmington High School.



'My husband and my parents.'
Susan Whitten
Farmington Hills



'My daughters: they do well in school and they exceed expectations.'
Dennis Traczyk
Farmington Hills



'Colin Parks-Fried. He's a kid in school. He's my role model. He doesn't try to be anyone but himself.'
Whitney Hawkins
Farmington Hills



'Brant Reilly. He's the quarterback and he shows good leadership and com-panionship.'
Kally McKeon
Farmington Hills

LETTERS

Good work appreciated

In these days when the broadcast and print media are being criticized justly or unjustly, I appreciate the efforts of Community Editor Dave Varga to make the Farmington Observer a first-class local newspaper.

The Observer should be lauded for its excellent coverage of state government by Tim Richard. Often the only information on the goings-on in Lansing is found in the Farmington Observer, not on local television or the Detroit newspapers.

Thanks, also, for the thoughtful columns by Phil Power on education and congratulations to staff photographer, Sharon LeFieux, for receiving national recognition for her wonderful photo of a child blowing bubbles.

Keep up the good work.
Marian McCracken
Farmington

Separate needs, wants

Golly gee, taxpayers! Our MEAP scores are down again, but that doesn't mean Farmington Public Schools can't provide students with a world-class education. We just need to raise more money, align our curriculum with the test, and try any other unproven educational fad we can find. If it works, hey, we did good. If it fails, well, the parents need to do a better job at home.

President Clinton declared that, "We cannot ask the American people to spend more money on education until we do a better job with the money we've got now." The district has been spending more and more money hiring additional administrators, specialists, and consultants, and playing with the curriculum for the past eight years. Where are the results?

Not one red cent of the \$10 million millage should be approved in March. Fire the consultants. Fire the administrators who haven't a clue how to choose curricula that work. Fire the morons who thrust invented spelling, whole language, multiculturalism, environmentalism, self-esteem, and every other invalid, time-wasting, nonacademic program on our children. Fire the principals who not only allow incompetent teachers to remain, but also don't seem to know what is actually being taught in their schools. Fire those teachers who can't seem to impart basic academic skills and knowledge to 30-40 percent of their students. By cutting out nonacademic fluff and the dead wood, Farmington could actually provide a world class education with just their state allocation.

As far as raising millions of dollars to spend on computers and the Internet, show me any school in the U.S. that has actually improved academic achievement by using computers. Just as claims about Whole Language and invented spelling were totally unfounded, so, too, is the current drive about computers. Computers are merely tools like pencils, dictionaries, and calculators — only extremely expensive and prone to rapid obsolescence. As

Yale computer scientist David Gelernter said, "The problem with schools are problems with basics. Reading, writing, history, and arithmetic are desperately needed. The Internet is like Driver's Ed, except more trivial."

Administrators must separate needs (roofs, boilers, and books) from wants (air conditioning, connecting everyone to the Internet, and raises for the teachers and administrators). I can't wait to see the district's entire sales pitch. So far, the consumer isn't buying.

Patricia A. Alsapach
Farmington

Smiling with O'Donahue

I am so pleased to see that Kathie O'Donahue's column has returned to the Farmington Observer (December and January).

Ms. O'Donahue is a talented writer who approaches her subject matter with honesty and a wonderful sense of humor. As a busy mother myself, I can easily relate to the topics about which she chooses to write. And it isn't often I get to smile — and even laugh — as I read items in today's news. I thank your Ms. O'Donahue for that opportunity.

I look forward to seeing Kathie O'Donahue's column in the Farmington Observer on a regular (and perhaps more frequent) basis. It is the first thing my husband and I look for in each issue.

Mary Ann Core
Farmington Hills

Tattling is taught

My son was assaulted by another student who pushed him and hit him in the face. My son defended himself and kicked his attacker in the groin, thus ending the assault. My son's mother, based on her conversation with school authorities, informs me our son made an "inappropriate choice."

Incredibly, I find out the Farmington Public Schools policy is that kids are not allowed to fight back when assaulted by other students, but must report the incident. Running from bullies usually invites more bullying by others, not to mention loss of self-esteem. This is preparation for the real world, where boys must register with Selective Service and be available for possible combat? Personally, I believe this policy is absurd, un-American and unrealistic and should be changed forthwith. I also know as a child, being picked on by the school bully did not stop until I let him have a serious right hook to the jaw.

Personally I abhor violence, however I abhor stupidity as well. Children must learn to defend themselves from others to survive, a basic lesson of life. I suggest the Board of Education review this policy, as I don't believe a majority of parents in this country would support children ages 10 through 18 being taught to tattle is the best way to deal with a "physical assault."

Ronald Oliverio
Farmington Hills

Farmington Observer

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— Philip Power