

Educators, reps see flaws in MEAP tests

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

State testing of public school students is here to stay. The public and press demand it, but educators see flaws.

The public gets "an inadequate impression of how well students are doing," said Ernest Bauer, a consultant for Oakland Schools, the countywide intermediate service agency.

A big culprit, Bauer told a legislative panel, is the "cut" scores that determine whether students get "proficient" or merely "satisfactory" ratings.

"For example, the latest fourth-grade reading results showed that just under 50 percent of the students in Michigan were 'satisfactory,'" Bauer told a House Education subcommittee Monday at a hearing in Waterford.

"Most educators and parents are amazed that the most common score in the state for those same fourth-grade students on the narrative reading test is 19 correct out of 20 possible."

"On the eighth-grade science test in the spring of 1997, students had to get 81.5 percent of the points possible to reach the 'proficient' level. Students who got 81 percent correct may as well have scored zero (in the public's eye)."

"The result was that in one district, the average student earned 69 percent of the points possible, while only 18 percent of the students were 'proficient.'"

Bauer said it was a "mystery" how the cut scores were set. Agreeing wholeheartedly was Rep. Rose Bogardus, D-Davison, a teacher for 30 years before her election to the Legislature. She found it impossible to understand an educator's explanation.

A further flaw, said Bauer, is that experts emphasize their own subject areas in devising the tests. For example, math and science questions are laden with words that are "merely ornamental"; they test reading rather than math and science.

■ 'On the eighth-grade science test in the spring of 1997, students had to get 81.5 percent of the points possible to reach the 'proficient' level. Students who got 81 percent correct may as well have scored zero (in the public's eye).'

Ernest Bauer
—Oakland Schools consultant

In elementary grades, the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests reading, writing, math and science. MEAP high school tests check 11th-graders on reading, writing, math, science and eventually social studies.

Rep. Tom Middleton, R-Ortonville, a former school board member, asked whether students "give 100 percent" on the statewide tests. Sample answers from teachers and principals in the audience:

■ "Fourth-graders ask if this is part of their grade (for the course). Many take it seriously. A few close their eyes."

■ "You'd be astonished at how seriously they take it."

■ Many 11th-graders ask, "What good is this test? How does it relate to my getting into college?" They rate ACT admissions tests as much more important than MEAP high school tests.

Art Ellis, state superintendent of public instruction, answered the questions about the MEAP program's importance late last year. He told the State Board of Education it will take up to five years for employers and college admissions officers to ask consistently to see MEAP scores on students' transcripts.

Middleton agreed with the five-years estimate.

Bauer, whose area is research, evaluation and assessment,

faulted state Department of Education for giving mixed signals on the importance of students' taking the MEAP tests. He cited a state official who asserted that "only special education and limited English proficient students can be exempted." State official said parents can exempt their students.

The legislative agent for Oakland Schools and also a member of the Waterford school board, Brian Whiston said it's impossible to make the tests mandatory. "I don't know how you get around it (parental consent). The parent can say, 'I just won't send my kid to school.'"

Bauer sees "a general perception is that tests are a crap shoot. That is not the case," he said, citing correlations between test scores and how students perform in their freshman year of college.

Dave Vultaggio, Waterford's director of management information systems, said tests could be better designed.

"Each year there are errors found within the test. There is more than one right answer — or no right answer at all," Vultaggio said, suggesting the state hire a professional test development firm instead of using "home grown" tests.

Vultaggio said the test could be shorter. Bogardus replied that the Department of Education, responding to a new state law, has trimmed the high school tests from 505 to 370 minutes for 1998.

Vultaggio also suggested that the essay be eliminated.

MEAP tests were developed beginning in the mid-1980s when employers complained that a high school diploma measured only "inputs" — how many hours a students sat in a class. Employers wanted some measure of "outputs" — what students had learned.

Vultaggio had the opposite criticism: "We (educators) dislike it because the tests only measure outputs with no reference to inputs."

Program seeks peace in Middle East

Area Jews and Arabs will join together at the Tribute Restaurant in Farmington Hills, March 1, to support "Seeds of Peace," a program designed to help bring a brighter future to the Middle East. Located in Maine, Seeds of Peace is a camp that for the past five years has brought hundreds of teenagers from regions of armed conflict to its internationally recognized conflict resolution summer program.

U.S. Senator Carl Levin will be the featured speaker at the event, which will also include presenta-

tions by two Israeli and Palestinian campers, as well as camp founder, John Wallach.

Following the program, the campers will visit West Bloomfield and Fordson (Dearborn) high schools on March 3. They also will participate in a social event for Jewish and Arab youth from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Southfield Centre for the Arts, on Southfield Road.

On March 2, the Jewish Federation of Metro Detroit, and Partnership 2000, will host David Gad-Harf, the Jewish Community Council executive director,

and the campers to a visiting delegation of Israeli women from the Central Galilee region at the Max. M. Fisher Building, in Bloomfield Township.

The Seeds of Peace event was originated by Gad-Harf, and is the result of the efforts of local activists from Arab and Jewish communities in the area. According to a JCC representative, the local event seeks to build awareness for Seeds of Peace and other initiatives, which support the group's shared commitment to peace in the Middle East.

Traditionally,
tax relief has come from
the drugstore.

Antacids and aspirin are only short-term solutions. Comerica banks offer longer-lasting tax relief in more ways than just competitive rates on time deposit accounts, traditional IRAs and Roth IRAs. Our Private Banking Relationship Managers can help you understand how the new tax law will impact your tax and estate planning. We can even refer you to Comerica Securities for consultation and advice on investment alternatives for your portfolio or for a Roth IRA. To find out more, call 1-800-292-1300. Or visit your neighborhood Comerica bank branch. Instead of the corner drugstore.

Comerica

We listen. We understand. We make it work.™

Mutual Funds and other investments offered by Comerica Securities are not FDIC insured; are not deposits or obligations of, or guaranteed by Comerica banks; and involve risk, including possible loss of principal. Comerica Securities is a broker-dealer, member NASD/SIPC and an affiliate of Comerica banks.

Comerica banks Equal Opportunity Lenders Members FDIC

www.comerica.com



Would you like to drive the lowest-priced car to offer standard anti-lock brakes and get \$1000 cash back?*

What's
Stopping
You?

The Chevy Cavalier has the most comprehensive standard safety package in its class! One reason — standard anti-lock brakes, a safety feature that's a \$400 option on competitive models like the Ford Escort. When you can get that kind of value and \$1000 cash back or 2.0% APR GMAC financing, it's a good time to stop by your Chevrolet dealer.

Cavalier  Genuine Chevrolet