

## LETTERS

## Back to the three Rs

Ever since our countrymen allowed the practice of removing prayer from our classrooms, our morality has dropped to the level of rodents. Our schools are greatly responsible for the children committing violent crimes. I'm not talking about the dedicated teachers. They will always be there. Thank God for them.

I'm frustrated. Morality, decency, responsibility, respect and the ability to know right from wrong has gone by the wayside in our educational systems throughout our country. This no longer is part or our educational system. Why? Doesn't this belong there? Are teachers afraid to teach?

As I look over the years, I looked up to our leaders. But what have our children got to look up to? Not our president, he didn't inhale! How about our Congress? They voted themselves the biggest fatter raise in history. We all complained but they ignored us.

But just try to correct the North problem for those shorted on their SS checks, born between 1917-1926. Rostenkowski would not allow the bill out of "his" committee to be voted on. Wasn't he a crook in Congress or am I wrong?

I'm a veteran of two wars - World War II and

Korea. I'm wondering, was it all in vain? To save what? A country that spends and spends, gives and gives and gives to any foreign country to buy their love of us? They hate our guts and love our money.

The only thing I see is that our vets forgot what they fought for or are ashamed. How about freedom and pursuit of peace for all mankind? I am not compromising or abandoning my fundamental values. I vote!

Children that use guns were not educated to respect other people and the lack of discipline can be reversed if parents and schools go back to the "three Rs" - Responsibility, Respect and Reunite. Our children are our future and doctors can help but it starts at home and in the schools!

Don't blame guns - I never saw a gun shoot anyone.

People kill people, they are the ones that need help.

George Strolczuk  
Farmington

## Test Isn't the problem

Parents have made a run on Farmington high schools to exempt their children from the

11th-grade proficiency test. Led by business leaders, the state revised the test to validate the value of a high school diploma: a diploma under attack by grade inflation and a preoccupation with self-esteem at the expense of quality and performance.

The issue is the state reform to replace a few multiple choice questions of the test with a written essay. An essay graded on structure, grammar, spelling, and using multiple examples to support positions.

I encourage Rep. Raczowski and Sen. Jullard to arrange to obtain the few examples of the writings of students in the top 10 percent of their class who did not receive a proficient rating and conduct, with Farmington school administrators, a town hall grading of those papers. Would you attend the meeting?

For those who think the test is the problem, consider the following:

Employees see high school graduates who are lacking in basic skills, including writing.

Colleges, especially community colleges that see many of our graduates, are complaining about the skill level of high school graduates and are having to provide remedial classes and support services.

How many written assignments has your

child been assigned and of those, how many were critically evaluated for structure, grammar and spelling, especially outside of their English classes?

What has been the consistency of instructional quality as your student progressed through Farmington schools? What was the consistency of learning within their classrooms?

I respectfully suggest that high school diplomas unfortunately need to be validated but that the problem is not in Lansing. Accountability, absolute standards, and placing self-esteem in its proper place as a product of effort and performance are required. The solution starts with your representation on the board of education.

David York  
Farmington Hills

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multi-billion or even billion-dollar investment perceive that the grief, the nagging, the incentive it may encounter isn't worth the expenditure of time it would take to get an EPA permit in southeastern Michigan?

The dilemma - treating minorities decently and achieving economic growth - is an enormous one. Yes, the conflicting goals can be resolved, but only if business perceives that government acts promptly in the permitting process.

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## Minority rights, business growth at odds

Threats to the business and jobs include:

High taxes.  
Lawsuits against "deep pockets."  
Aggressive unionism.  
Civil rights.

Civil rights? Yep. That's the latest phenomenon that businesses - or "job providers," as they prefer to be called - are citing as an impediment to economic growth. State officials, such as Russ Harding of the Department of Environmental Quality, agree.

The news from Washington is that President Bill Clinton intends to adopt a proposal from his Environmental Protection Agency to enforce title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Target is "environmental racism," where minority communities seem to become unwilling hosts to industries that pollute.

Business seems to fear it will have to jump through more hoops in order

to get EPA permits for such things as an asphalt plant in Belleville, landfill gas processing in Canton, storage tanks everywhere, a paint shop in Flat Rock, paint manufacturing and auto fiber glass operations in Westland, even hospital boilers in Pontiac.

The topic came up at last week's executive committee meeting of SEMCOG, the Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments. SEMCOG adherents are big on stopping "urban sprawl," the eating up of rural greenfields and the abandoning of older cities.

Some sacred goals seem to be in conflict. No patriotic, sensitive American wants to dump pollution on minorities - right? But we also want to see redevelopment in older, minority areas so they can have jobs and tax base - right?

Said Wayne Probate Judge Milton Mack: "I don't think it (stifling of growth) is an unintended consequence" of EPA's civil rights stance.

Said Juddy Hood, West Bloomfield Township supervisor: "It will discourage modifications even if it (industry) cleans up."

Said Dante Lanzetta, Birmingham council member: "There's going to be a balancing act... You don't write off one end of the spectrum."

Said John Cronin, a Brownstown Township trustee: "It's a typical Clinton tactic: Use an executive order to thwart the will of Congress."

In other words, three out of four say we can protect minorities and still have economic growth.

What we've been hearing on National Public Radio now is coming home to southeastern Michigan. NPR has given a lot of time to the Louisiana story about a minority community that fought the location of a uranium enrichment plant. I drove through the general area in fall of 1996, utterly amazed at all the chemical plants in the bayou country. I

understood both sides' concern but didn't dream the conflict would come to my neck of the American woods.

The latest word is that the industry has given up after spending \$30 million fighting charges of environmental racism. That is the kind of case you hear about.

But what about the cases you don't hear about? What about the companies, usually small, that say, "Phooey, we're not going to put up with that kind of grief. We're not going to file all the paperwork with EPA and DEQ. We're not going to be subjected to angry shouts from activists who don't have market forces to face. We'll just quietly go someplace else and not subject ourselves to this."

Our SEMCOG leaders think it's possible to achieve a balancing act between racial sensitivity and economic growth. They probably are right. The problem, however, is business perception. Will a company planning a

## Universities should heed results of proficiency tests

Thousands of high school juniors are taking the newly revised Michigan high school proficiency test this spring.

Last year's version was heavily criticized. Too long (took something like 11 hours). Too negative (who wants to be judged "not yet novice"?). Too pointless (why take the test when nobody looks at the results?).

Some parents started signing waivers exempting their kids from taking the test. In fact, according to Rep. Sharon Gire, who held hearings around the state on the MHSPT, "There was kind of a panicked reaction going on. It's quite likely the test could have been eliminated."

That would have been a disaster in the struggle for school reform. Contrary to the ideologues' relentless search for some silver bullet, the only proven way to improve student performance is to define clearly what pupils are expected to learn, assess what in fact they do learn and then make mid-course corrections.

The proficiency test is a key part in this process. Fortunately, sanity prevailed. With solid bipartisan support, the Legislature adopted a series of changes in the MEAP high school tests. The tests were shortened. They were moved to the end of the junior year. The old scoring system was changed, although the State Board of Education has yet to make up its mind about the exact terms to characterize performance.

So can we rest easy? Far from it.

A lot of people are still griping about the tests. Students ask why go to the bother when they're passing all their classes and going to graduate. Parents worry their kid's poor score in the MEAP high school tests will undo good grades or a high score on the SAT or ACT in getting into a good college.

Worse, the institutions that stand to benefit most from universal use of the high school proficiency test - employers and universities - are paying little attention to the results of the test in hiring or admissions decisions.

Jim Sandy, executive director of the Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence, a group organized through the Michigan State Chamber of Commerce, is having a tough go in persuading companies to check job applicants for their MEAP high school test results.

Maybe it's because the tests are relatively new. Maybe it's because the implications of the tests for job performance are not yet clearly understood. But it was complaints from the



PHILIP POWER

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business community that new entrants to the job market were poorly prepared that originally provoked the demand for school improvement. For business to ignore what it helped create is silly and short-sighted.

Just as culpable are the state's colleges and universities that so far have resolutely refused to take MEAP high school test results into consideration in admissions decisions.

"How come?" I asked University of Michigan Admissions Director Ted Spencer.

"Unlike the SAT or the ACT, this test was not designed to predict success in college," Spencer explained. Not only that, but "the test comes at the wrong time of the year to help us in making admission decisions."

I understand that Gov. John Engler met last month with the presidents of Michigan's public universities and asked them at least to take a look at the MHSPT results in admissions. He got turned down.

University presidents whine continually about poor high school preparation given their incoming students. They should get with the program and start asking their admissions officers at least to take MHSPT results into consideration or quit complaining.

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail at [ppower@oeonline.com](mailto:ppower@oeonline.com)

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