

Measuring MEAP

District tackles uneven school-by-school scores

Schools in the Farmington district are taking a more-focused approach to the Michigan Educational Assessment Program these days, with teachers collaborating with those in other grades and across subject areas in order to determine the best instructional approach.

Despite such efforts, the 1998 MEAP building-by-building scores are decidedly uneven with some fifth-graders struggling to answer science questions such as why snowflakes melt in human hands.

And now, it's time to figure out the reason, said two members of the district's test assessment team, as they peruse results of building-by-building results in the fifth and eighth grade science and writing MEAP tests, which were administered in January and February.

According to Carolyn Mahalak, coordinator of the district's assessment department, and Barbara Cherem, director of evaluation assessment and special projects, it might be a while before the why and wherefore are clearly spelled out.

One reason is that the 1997-98 school year is ending, with teachers scattering for much of the summer. Another is the sheer glut of statistical information pouring into the district's assessment office; the fifth- and

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Barbara Cherem
-director of evaluative assessment

"With all this activity and concentration of data it is difficult to look at it with any intense, meaningful discussion," Mahalak said. "Staff needs time to look at what we have to make sense out of it."

Meanwhile, they said, the continuing change in the MEAP test scores of fifth-graders attaining a satisfactory (proficient) score on the science portion dropped from 54.8 percent in 1997 to 52.1 percent in this year's test.

Looking at building-by-building scores, the success of students in fifth grade science fluctuated dramatically.

For example, Longacre Elementary School students dropped from 61.5 percent satisfactory in 1997 to 26.2 percent this year. Even students at the top-scoring school, Highmeadow Common Campus, dropped 3

percent from the previous year.

Of 14 schools, six registered drops in student performance in fifth grade science.

"The old science test was more basic science," Cherem said. "This is really hard to tease out just how to interpret (them). I think the word science, in and of itself, is misleading. It's really a high-order test in relation to thinking."

Cherem said that fifth grade science scores were "so uneven it's hard to tease out just how to interpret (them). We really have to analyze what's going on there."

She said the science test no longer is a matter of A, B, C or D - although multiple choice questions still are a MEAP staple. "We've got a test that's so tough in terms of two other abilities, reading and analysis, or higher-order thinking."

In the eighth grade science test, scores improved from 21.1 to 37.1 percent proficient, up from 98.2 percent, or better, above the district average (22.0) but not where the district wants them to be. All four middle schools improved over last year, from a 6.5 percent gain at East (22.7 to 28.2) to a 23.5 percent jump at Power, from 19.0 to 42.5.

Fifth grade writing scores also dipped from last year, dropping from 89.7 to 83.3 percent districtwide. Forest Elementary students scored 100 percent proficient, up from 98.2 percent. Other top-performing schools were Highmeadow (98.7), Gill Year Round

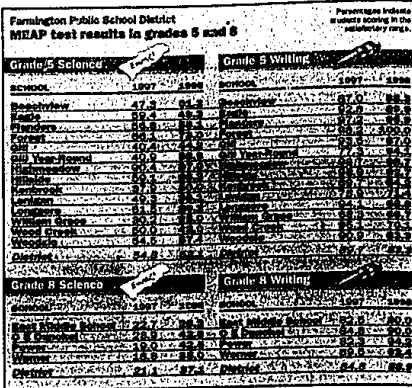
(94.1) and Hillsdale (92.7).

Near the bottom of the ladder, Longacre students went from 94.1 percent proficient in 1997 to 68.8 percent this year. Cherem said questions posed in the fifth grade writing test contributed to the drop in scores. Students were asked to write about a personal loss, such as the death of a family pet, for example.

"Kids have trouble writing about losses," Cherem said. "You contaminate the real ability to access how effective a writer they are, because you're throwing in some additional variables there."

The eighth grade writing test provided the most reason to cheer. Of the four middle schools, three scored 90 percent or better, with 94.2 percent of Power students passing the test.

Students wrote about how they or someone they know faced and overcame challenges.



That kind of question, Mahalak explained, "tends to have a positive spin to it, you faced something and worked your way through it."

And, said Cherem, the brain more easily retrieves positive memories. "It's less emotionally charged."

Despite the wide range of per-

formance, Mahalak and Cherem said schools should not be too severely criticized because some buildings might place more emphasis on MEAP than others.

"I think they may be focusing on other priorities that are equally important, but not just reflected in MEAP scores," Cherem said.

Test yourself on MEAP questions

Sample MEAP Question - Science, Grade 5:

How would scientists describe what first happens to the snowflakes that had landed on Marily's hand?

- A. The snow changed to rain.
- B. The snow melted to water.
- C. Snow is really just water, so nothing actually happened.
- D. The snow mixed with the sweat on her hand and dissolved.

Sample MEAP Questions - Science, Grade 8:

Why was it important for Jamie to chew her sandwich before swallowing it?

- A. Chewing helps the food stick together more efficiently.
- B. Only bite-size pieces can pass through the

stomach wall into the bloodstream.

C. Saliva and digestive juices can operate more efficiently on smaller pieces of food.

D. Chewing allows some of the food to be absorbed into the bloodstream.

Which of the following represents the correct pathway of the nutrients in the food that Jamie has eaten?

- A. From the circulatory system to the cells to the digestive system.
- B. From the circulatory system to the digestive system to the cells.
- C. From the digestive system to the circulatory system to the cells.
- D. From the cells to the digestive system to the circulatory system.

Correct answers: B, C, C

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Temple from page A1

Society officials initially asked that festivities continue for 10 days after several meetings, including a Zoning Board of Appeals session May 5, the event was trimmed to five days and the parade scaled back from 20 floats to nine. The parade will run 15 hours instead of three. Trees will have to be leveled in order to put up tents, which allows followers to listen to religious scholars reciting scripture through a video link from the temple. Organizer Vastupal Shah apologized but said their removal is necessary.

Jainism, which is based on peace and non-violence, is one of the oldest religions in India and has more than 100,000 followers in the United States. The Farmington Hills temple will be the second of its kind in the country and serve 300 Jain families in the Detroit area.

"This is a lifetime opportunity for us," Shah said. "This was not taken lightly. We are willing to replant the trees around the site."

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Though the ZBA approved the tree removal under several stipulations that include replanting, Grant said he couldn't vote in favor of the permit.

"We hold developers' feet to the fire over taking one tree out," Grant said.

Of those removed, three are landmark trees: black oaks, black cherry, red elms and red pines, many of which are 8 to 12 inches in diameter.

The society will be required to replant trees within two years as part of 23 conditions approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals.

An organizer assured the council that the temple will be constructed in time for the June 27 event. "I see progress, but a lot of work needs to be done, too," City Manager Daniel Hobbs said.

The parade will start 9 a.m. from Mercy High School and proceed north to 12 Mile July 5. The society has agreed to pay for additional costs involved with extra police or fire help needed for the event.

A neighbor of the temple asked that wall be put up to deflect noise and private security be hired. The society is complying, an organizer said.

Peter and Caroline Michaels Abowd live on 12 Mile east to the temple and have complained about the five-year construction at the site.

"I hope that the members of the Jain Society realize what fantastically patient neighbors they have acquired," wrote the couple in a letter to the city. "Six months of Saturday-morning pounding of patience; five years is sainthood."

Tea from page A1

work, Hobbs said. A timetable hasn't been set yet as far as when golfers will get a crack at the back nine.

Tentative plans involve putting seven holes on the new site while trying to squeeze two more on the current San Marino golf course. There's also talk of possibly breaking off parcels of 250-acre sites and calling it a research office development.

Expanding San Marino is part of the city's parks and recreation master plan.

In recent years, the city has acquired large parcels that led to 88-acre Founders Sports Park and the Farmington Hills Ice Arena and 78-acre Woodland Hills Nature Park.

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