

MEAP: C'ville officials have more to cheer about

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Clarenceville school administrators, emboldened by last year's science test scores, have a lot more to cheer about in the science scores achieved by this year's crop of test takers.

Scores on the three other tests — math, reading, writing — were a mixed bag, with some surging ahead, others floundering behind.

percent of fifth graders considered "proficient" in science.

An even bigger jump was made by Clarenceville Middle School eighth graders, who went from last year's embarrassingly low 14.4 percent proficient to this year's score of 30.5 percent. The state average here is 23 percent.

What these scores tell me is that when we emphasize something, we do well," said Matt Boettcher, the newly re-elected Clarenceville Board of Education trustee who took his oath of office Thursday. "It shows me we can succeed if we put our minds to it."

Disappointment expressed last year by Clarenceville administrators when the low scores were unveiled made it certain

that science would be the subject stressed this year in the two elementary and middle schools. No big jumps are seen in the other three areas tested on the spring 1999 tests: math, reading and writing. In some areas, such as middle school reading, scores even went backward.

"To get scores to go up, you have to sacrifice other things," said Jim Lancaster, who retired last week from the district as assistant superintendent for curriculum and moved to a new job in Houston.

Even with some backward movement, 1999 scores are "a lot better than what we were talking about last year," Lancaster said.

Boettcher stuck a visual image on the 1999 MEAP scores: "The

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ship is not sinking. We're holding our heads above water."

In assessing MEAP test results, educators hope to see a steady, uphill climb, not a roller-coaster ride such as experienced by Clarenceville in past years.

Fourth and seventh graders slightly retreated on the math test, backtracking from last year's 74.4 percent to this year's 72.2 percent. Seventh graders

did the opposite, moving from 56.1 percent to 59 percent on the math test.

On the reading test, fourth graders barely budged from last year's 63.2 percent. On the same test, the seventh graders skidded backward, from last year's 49.6 percent to this year's 44.7 percent.

Eight graders also retreated on the writing test, moving from

last year's 55.1 percent to this year's 50.6 percent.

"Middle schoolers fell a little; they're still an area of concern," Lancaster said.

On the same writing test, the fifth graders surged forward, from last year's 74.0 percent to 70.7 percent.

The state released 1999 MEAP test scores Thursday, about two weeks later than they were scheduled to be released because of a scoring glitch on the science test.

The glitch, a question missed by the scoring company, has since been cleared up.

Fifth-grade science scores are now accurate, officials said.

District's middle schools decline on reading portion

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As expected, Farmington Public Schools' students continued to outperform the state average in the "satisfactory" category in the Michigan Education Assessment Program tests, but it slipped behind Oakland County results in one area.

That area is seventh-grade reading, the same segment in which the district saw its lead over the state narrow.

Oakland County schools totaled 61 percent in the MEAP's satisfactory reading category, beating the Farmington district's 57.7 percent.

However, Farmington still led the statewide Michigan MEAP average, though the lead narrowed a good bit. The state average rose 4.2 percent, from

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48.8 percent in 1998 to 53.0 in '99, while Farmington's performance slipped 2.6 percent, from 60.3 percent in '98 to this year's 57.7.

All four Farmington district middle schools showed declines in satisfactory reading on the MEAP, led by East, which went from 65.3 percent to 51.7.

Power slipped from 62.2 percent to 59.9, Dunkel from 61.0 percent to 58.4 and Warner from 62.3 percent to 61.

East has shown a roller-coaster pattern the last four years, going from 56.1 percent satisfactory in 1995 to 50.9 in '96, then to 55.3 in '97-'98.

Gene Seaborn, East principal, said he couldn't comment about the dip because MEAP results didn't arrive until after school was finished for the year and the teachers had gone.

However, Carolyn Mahalak, retiring assessment coordinator for the district, pointed out that all four schools did well in the story-reading portion of the MEAP, but all four declined in the informational reading portion, bringing their overall scores down.

Also, she said, East may be more subject than the others to students enrolling and then dropping out from year to year.

But the improvement in statewide reading scores earned praise from Gov. John Engler, who last week signed legislation creating the Michigan Merit Award Scholarships for students.

Engler said he is pleased to see "steady improvement" in the reading tests, noting that reading "is the fundamental key to understanding any subject."

With the scholarships in place, he said, "students and educators will have a clear goal in mind as they work toward continued improvement."

Statewide averages were released in Lansing Thursday by the Department of Education after several weeks' delay due to an error in scoring some districts' science results. Farmington was not among those districts.

Comparisons between Farmington, Oakland County and state averages in mathematics, reading, science and writing:

■ Mathematics — 7th Grade: Farmington 78 percent, Oakland County 70.2 percent, Michigan 63.2 percent. 4th Grade: Farmington 84.1 percent, Oakland County 79.2 percent, Michigan 71.7 percent.

■ Reading — 7th: Farm. 57.7, OC 61, state 53.0. 4th: Farm. 71.2, OC 57.9, state 59.4.

■ Science — 8th: Farm. 32.9, OC 30.3, state 23.0. 5th: Farm. 53, OC 45.9, state 37.5.

■ Writing — 6th: Farm. 55.5, OC 59.2, state 53.5. 5th: Farm. 72.1, OC 55.8, state 54.8.



STAFF PHOTO BY JILL BRADLEY
Explain: Carolyn Mahalak says the middle schools did well in the story-reading portion.

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