'We're not cheaters' educators tell state lawmakers

"We're not cheaters" was the

"Wo're not cheaters' was the message dozens of superintendents sent to state lawmakers at a hearing on the MEAP test Thursday, June 14, in Lansing. And despite a "sincere" apology from state Treasurer Doug Roberts for releasing the names of 71 schools where "irregularities" were spotted in MEAP test nameers, educators say the damoge has already been done. "I am here today to sincerely apologize for the way this issue has unfolded," Roberts and at the outset of a special joint meeting of the Senate and House Education committees. "Obviously, it was never the state's intention that schools, teachers and students be subjected to what was essentially an indictment of their integrity, I can't go back and undo what happened this year, but I can learn an important lesson about how this superior was the subjected to what has sessentially an indictment of their integrity. I can't go back and undo what happened this year, but I can learn an important lesson about how this issue will be handed in the future. I can assure everyone here today on well as a school the future. I can assure everyone here today, as well as a school

officials throughout Michigan, that there will be no future press conferences about test irregulari-ties prior to school districts being contacted for response."

Responded to leak

Responded to leak

He explained he felt compelled to put out all the information about irregularities — which may indicate cheating or "teacher interference" — because a reporter had obtained a copy of the list through a leak.

Roberts said he realized later he should have simply refused to confirm the list for that reporter. Sen. Loren Bennett, R-Canton, called Roberts a "class act" for apologizing and accepting responsibility so quickly. "How often do you see that in government these days?" he asked.

Bennett, chair of the Senate Education Committee, predicted that when the Treasury Department completes its review of the irregularities and the responses from school districts that it will find a few instances of actual cheating, but "the vast majority" will be exonerated.

"I look at that one example,

Explanations given

Of the superintendents who appeared before his committee, most gave perfectly reasonable explanations for the "irregularities" seen in their test results. He noted that the original list of irregularities, after test scorers were done grading, included more than 400 schools.

Educators tossed out many of those on review, paring the list to 71. Roberts told lawmakers that what had been include as "irregularities" were test answers in which different students had answers that were virtual copies, different handwriting in a single answer, identical phrasing in different students' answers, and vocabulary that was inconsistent with the grade

out of a class of 20 in which six students gave identical answers, three sentences long, with every word appelled correctly. I find that a bit beyond chance," he said. Although that "irregularity" was included in a set of examples, the Treasury Department has not identified which school it came from.

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"Once this had been reviewed,

you will find there is nothing improper here," he said. "But the accusation has been made and it cannot be corrected ... The dam-

13 Mile

age has been done. The kids know they have been accused of cheating."

No fix

Of Roberts' comments, Wilmot said, "I accept his apology but it doesn't fix it."

Wilmot noted that the information was released one day before an election in Garden City of \$35 million in bonds. While it still passed, he said several parents told him they would not vote for it because "cheating" was going on in the school district.

Oak Park's Pepper Elementary made the list because several students mentioned Oakwood Street in their essay answers to a question asking them to tell about a time when they got lost.

Oakwood is three blocks from the school, and it's five blocks from the school of the

al students mentioned Oakwood Street in their essay answers to a question asking them to tell about a time when they got lost. "Oakwood is three blocks from the school, and it's five blocks long. We have a lot of students who live on Oakwood," Superin-tendent Alexander Baily said. But beyond that, he couldn't find any similarities in their

find any similarities in their

answers.

Baily said the state handed out examples that constituted

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Rezmierski said Winchester Eie-mentary appeared on the list because several students, when solving, wrote about an issue at the school in which a playground had been taken over for parking space. Several had used the phrase "more parking for par-ents and teachers."

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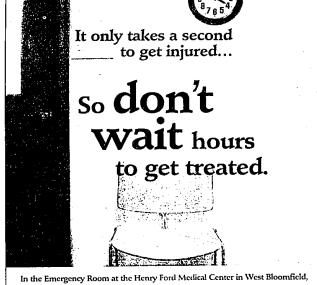
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