

Prepare students for MEAP and other tests

Q: It really bothers me to see that less than half of our fourth and seventh grade students passed the MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) reading test this year. The same is true of our eighth and 11th grade science test results. It seems we're going backward. I know our district did much better on these tests a couple years ago. May be we should teach the test like I hear some districts did in past year. What's our problem?

A: Yes, your district and most others in the state scored much better on the MEAP test in past years. Yes, scores are much lower this year than in the past.

Take reading for example. Districts that had 80 or 90 percent of their students mastering the fourth, seventh and 10th grade reading ob-

jectives now have 40 to 50 percent mastering the reading objectives. Why the difference?

The new MEAP reading is entirely different. It requires entirely different test-taking skills and requires an entirely different teaching emphasis than the former test.

The former MEAP test in reading, which was phased out two years ago, focused on testing to determine if children had the individual and isolated skills necessary to read a passage.

Some say these individual and isolated skills can be in the hundreds.

Since, in the past, the Michigan Department of Education, in its infinite wisdom, wanted children tested on isolated skills, (for example word recognition) and because the MEAP results were published in the local



Doc Doyle

newspapers, a heavy focus was placed on teaching isolated reading skills. It is that simple. The public reads the newspaper.

The curriculum and teaching had, under the pressure of a state mandated test, played the game and as a result MEAP reading scores soared up to as high as 95 percent in some districts. Comprehension and understanding of what was read was left to be learned through class dis-

cussions, follow-up writing assignments, term papers and the like for students.

Now, however, the game has been changed. The state's new MEAP reading test has moved away from testing individual skills, like word recognition, and now tests for comprehension and understanding.

It's essential for the next generation to have these skills. In a rapidly changing world, different ideologies and issues, from religion to abortion, all call from more than a Pavlovian response to memorized information. But keep the faith. Our MEAP math scores have increased for an average of 40 percent mastery several years ago to an almost 85 percent average in the tri-county area. You see we can do it if we set our standards high.

The state Department of Education is revising a new MEAP math test for next year. It will be focused primarily on understanding concepts and reasoning and will allow use of calculators as opposed to the basic memorized calculation skills used in the past.

Can one assume an initial drop in math scores? Yes. But remember the state Department of Education has revised the MEAP test about four to five times over the years... making it tougher each time... and educators in most stable districts have risen to the challenge. Students will take on the new challenge and perform well... given time.

To answer your other question, we should not teach the test because we can't teach the test. The seal on the

MEAP test can't be opened until it is handed to the student.

But yes, many if not most districts, do teach to the skills students need in preparation for the test.

There is nothing wrong with preparing students for a test. Every classroom teacher does it, every athletic coach does it prior to a game. Every drama teacher reviews lines with students prior to the opening performance of a play.

We should prepare our children for what they will face, be it the MEAP test or whatever.

James "Doc" Doyle is a former Troy Schools administrator. His column on educational issues appears regularly.

from our readers

Sisters of Mercy against war

To the editor:

The leadership Council of the Sisters of Mercy, based in Farmington Hills, add their voices to those of the many Americans who have spoken out against the U.S. military buildup in the Persian Gulf.

They deplore the expense of human and material resources on this primitive method of conflict resolution. This expense is especially deplorable at a time when the Sisters of Mercy, along with others committed to education, health care and social welfare, are struggling and often failing to find the means of providing these basic human rights for an increasing number of people.

They concur with the Catholic bishops' position that the requisites for a just war are lacking in this Middle East situation. They urge that U.S. involvement be focused on supporting all efforts to peacefully negotiate the prevention of this impending global disaster.

The Sisters of Mercy are a multi-cultural and bilingual order of religious women in the Roman Catholic church, numbering 7,500 members and 1,000 Associates in North, South and Central America, Guam and the Philippines.

They sponsor some of the largest

health care systems in the United States; they work in education from pre-primary to graduate schools and they have collaborated to make low income housing available in eight states.

Since 1980, the Sisters of Mercy have sponsored 16 centers for the homeless; they also sponsored the first center for Central American refugees in the United States.

Sister Gretchen Elliott, administrator, Province of Detroit

Bill restores rationality in drug cases

To the editor:

I commend your Nov. 29 editorial supporting state Rep. William R. Bryant, Jr.'s, R-Grosse Pointe Farms, introduction of a bill to incorporate some rationality in drug offender sentencing. This bill calls for a minimum of five years sentence for those caught with over one and a half pounds of cocaine. Additionally, it allows a sentence of up to life in jail. This is a tough bill. Yet, it avoids the irrationality that has caused the wrong people to be sentenced under the current law to mandatory life without parole at tremendous costs to our state.

While there would be a five year

minimum jail term, under the new law judges could take the following into consideration:

1. Victims of Drug Usage. Many of the current lifers are not drug kingpins, but were users who were paid in small cash or drugs to carry or deliver.

2. Not Targets of Investigation. Anyone who participates in the transaction, under the current law gets mandatory life. So while the leader of an organization may deserve life, does the first offender who agrees to be a look out in order to get his/her own drugs deserve the same penalty?

3. Not Professional Drug Dealers. A review of the over 120 people now serving mandatory life discloses that over 50 percent are first time offenders. Unfortunately, one reason that kingpins are not caught is that prosecutors in some counties are just as happy to get a headline from these cases, rather than do the hard work of getting the bigger criminals.

4. Complete Lack of Signs of Wealth or Profit. Forfeiture laws allow for the taking away of wealth of drug dealers. Yet most of the people doing life had no fancy homes, cars or life styles.

5. Criteria in the Current Law not Rational. Under the current law if a defendant has 649 grams of 100 percent pure cocaine a judge can sentence him or her to a lesser term of years. Yet, if the person has 650 grams of a powder containing 1 percent cocaine, the sentence has to be mandatory life without parole.

6. Currently Gross Dispropor-

tionality between State and Federal Courts. In Michigan a person arrested with 650 grams of a substance containing cocaine if arrested by federal authorities and taken to Federal Court can face 10-15 years (recently boosted to this penalty) while if arrested by local police for the same offense will face a mandatory sentence of life without parole.

Representative Bryant's proposal which provides for a tough five year minimum sentence and provides a judge discretion to sentence up to mandatory life in jail will give rationality to drug sentencing.

Martin I. Reisel, Birmingham

Scouts say, Thank You

To the editor:

The Boy Scouts of Troop 110 at Our Lady of Sorrows Church would like to thank the communities of Farmington and Farmington Hills for their generous thoughtfulness in supporting the scouts' efforts to make the holidays brighter for our soldiers in the Middle East.

A special thanks goes to the following public facilities for hosting our donation centers: both Public Libraries, the Department of Public Safety for Farmington, the City of Farmington Hills City Hall, the Community Center, The Farmington Hills Fire Department, and Our

Lady of Sorrows parishioners. Our thanks to the Observer Newspapers and MetroVision for public announcements.

Happy Holidays to all.
Jonathan Bouchard, Farmington

She thanks Hills cops

To the editor:

I have been working in the Farmington area for the past nine years. During this time, I have had several encounters with the Farmington Hills Police.

Some of these encounters have been through my job as a bartender and the others have been as a Michigan driver. Whatever the circumstances, the police officers have always been very professional, courteous and helpful.

Last Thursday night/Friday morning, Dec. 6-7, was no exception. I finished working shortly after midnight and started my car to warm up as I scraped my windows.

Force of habit compelled me to lock the doors. There I was... locked out of my running car.

Due to the late hour, my only viable option was to call the Farmington Hills Police. I placed my call at 12:15 a.m. The officer I spoke to on the phone was polite and assured me he would send an officer soon. Officers Jim and Mike arrived at

12:25 a.m. and after the necessary paperwork was completed, they began to unlock my car.

A few minutes later, at 12:30 a.m. I was back in the driver's seat. Officers Jim and Mike were very affable and we had a good laugh over my slightly hairbrained maneuver.

The reason for this letter is to let you know that I appreciate the superb job your police force performs.

If their prompt and courteous attention to my non-emergency situation is any indication of how they handle emergency and life threatening situations, I'm glad I spend so much of my time in Farmington Hills.

Mary Beth Bergeron, Bloomfield Hills

Opinions are to be shared

Opinions and ideas are best when shared with others.

That's why the Farmington Observer encourages its readers to share their views with others in the From Our Readers column.

Names will be withheld only for the best of reasons, and the decision to do so will be made by the editor.

Letters should be mailed to: the editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

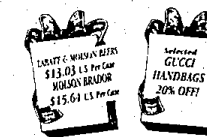
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HOLIDAY HOURS

Windsor:	December 24 -	Close	10:00 P.M.
	December 25 -	Open	9:00 A.M.
	December 26 -	Open	6:00 P.M.
	December 27 -	Open	8:00 A.M.
Sarnia:	December 27 -	Open	10:00 P.M.
	December 31 -	Open	7:00 A.M.
	January 2 -	Open	10:00 P.M.
	January 1 -	Open	10:00 P.M.

Canadian Duty Free Shop

WINDSOR - Windsor Tunnel (313)961-0045

SARNIA - Bluewater Bridge (519)332-4680

(On the Canadian Side - Keep Right After Paying Toll)

GREAT GIFT IDEAS! Liquor, Canadian Beer and Tobacco products. This Christmas save on Imported Fragrances, Skin Care products by Lancome and Elizabeth Arden, Lladro Figurines, Gold Jewelry, Swiss Watches, Swiss Chocolates, Swarovski Crystal, Silk Ties, Executive Pens, Canadiana, Giftware and Designer Handbags by Gucci, Fendi and Christian Dior. Why wait until boxing day to save, drop by now and check out our December Specials!

DID YOU KNOW: U.S. Residents returning home from Canada may import into the U.S.A. free of tax and duty: Daily \$25.00 per person excluding liquor and tobacco; After 48 hours in Canada \$400.00 worth of goods including 1 litre of liquor (must be 20 years of age), 200 cigarettes or 100 cigars.