

Math, science MEAP scores ebb in high school

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Staff Writer

EDUCATION

Everybody talks about how MEAP scores went up or down from one year to another, but why do so many scores take a dive between the fourth-grade and 10th-grade tests? Are the kids getting progressively stupider? Take the Michigan Education Assessment Program's science test, for example. Given in the fifth, eighth and 11th grades, the

exam tests the students' general knowledge of science topics. Of Oakland County's 28 school districts, all but two reported a lower percentage of passing scores on the 11th-grade science test, when compared to the fifth-grade test. One extreme example is Southfield, where about 81 percent of

fifth-graders taking the test last September passed it, but just 33 percent of the 11th graders passed.

Results of the MEAP math test are similar. Every school district in Oakland County shows a significant decline in the percentage of passing scores when comparing the 10th-grade test to the fourth-grade test. Even top-regarded school districts reflect this trend. In the Bloomfield Hills district about 89 percent of fourth-graders passed the math test, but just 52 percent of 10th graders did. And that 52 percent is the highest in the county.

Not true of reading

This isn't as true of reading scores, most of which were up somewhat in the higher grades.

Bob Greene, director of evaluation and research for Troy schools, said the dropoff in math and science is the result of four things:

■ The 10th-grade science and math tests are more difficult for 10th graders than the fourth-grade tests are for fourth-graders.

■ Instruction for 10th graders is compartmentalized (science here, math there) as opposed to the homogeneous approach practiced in elementary school.

■ Tenth graders have a lot more going on in their lives than fourth graders do.

■ And 10th graders don't necessarily take the courses needed to do well on the MEAP science and math tests.

"Some kids may not take any math at all in the ninth grade," Greene said. "We can do much more in a more focused way with fourth-grade students." Jim Steeby, the assistant superintendent for instruction at Avondale schools, said that parents are more apt to get involved with their children's school work when they are in elementary school, but not so much later.

Parent involvement key

"There is a lot less parental willingness to work with the chil-

dren as they get older," he said, adding that open houses in elementary schools are much better attended by parents than open houses in high schools.

Still, most school officials are looking for ways to increase 10th and 11th grade MEAP scores, and most often the answer is to teach subjects the tests emphasize and teach them before the tests are taken.

For example, the 10th-grade MEAP math test has a lot of algebra in it, so some students don't pass it just because they didn't take algebra in the ninth grade. Consequently, a move is afoot in many school districts to see that students are taught everything a given MEAP test covers and taught it before the test.

Merle Bartley, the director of program development for Rochester schools, said it's a matter of making sure "you're teaching the skills and concepts being tested." Bartley added that some schools also try to mimic the MEAP test's format when creating their own tests. That way, he said, students will feel more comfortable with the test structure.

All this becomes much more important next year when graduating seniors can get a "state endorsed" diploma only if they've passed the MEAP reading, math and science tests in high school. Then beginning with the class of '97, students who don't pass the tests don't get a diploma at all.

"It's become more of a high-stakes kind of test," Greene said. "All school districts are looking at it more seriously."

In fact, school districts in the Observer & Eccentric circulation area are tops in the county in every category with the exception of fourth grade reading, in which Novi students had the best scores.

Bloomfield Hills students had the best math scores across the board. West Bloomfield seventh grade students were tops in reading, as were Birmingham 10th graders. Birmingham fifth graders scored highest in science, as did Troy eighth graders and West Bloomfield High School Juniors.

Mapping the MEAP scores

Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) results for schools in the Observer & Eccentric readership area. This chart shows the percentage of students who scored in the satisfactory category on the tests during the '92-'93 school year.

	Math	Reading	Science*
4th grade			
Avondale	58.4	47.8	79.7
Birmingham	65.8	56.5	81.8
Bloomfield Hills	88.4	82.7	82.8
Farmington	63.8	54.6	88.8
Rochester	60.8	54.8	88.5
Southfield	62.6	46.5	80.5
Troy	63.2	56.8	86.8
Walled Lake	49.8	45.9	77.8
West Bloomfield	63.0	63.5	80.3
7th grade			
Avondale	33.5	31.2	64.2
Birmingham	69.0	58.1	78.2
Bloomfield Hills	70.4	56.6	79.6
Farmington	56.6	48.9	73.3
Rochester	62.8	57.4	75.8
Southfield	31.8	25.9	51.5
Troy	59.3	51.8	81.3
Walled Lake	41.3	36.6	59.8
West Bloomfield	63.4	68.6	73.6
10th grade			
Avondale	20.7	45.1	47.0
Birmingham	48.1	67.6	67.9
Bloomfield Hills	51.7	65.2	66.4
Farmington	42.6	67.3	60.6
Rochester	40.1	56.8	67.4
Southfield	15.3	38.9	33.0
Troy	42.7	53.5	59.7
Walled Lake	23.9	41.9	44.0
West Bloomfield	39.8	61.3	71.7

*Science scores are based on tests given to 8th, 9th and 11th graders

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Knollenberg opens local offices

U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg, R-Bloomfield Township, has established offices in Farmington Hills and Livonia to serve constituents in Michigan's 11th District.

Knollenberg, who was elected in November, is the first congressman to represent the newly constituted 11th District, which covers parts of Oakland and Wayne counties.

The Farmington Hills office is located in the Northwestern Financial Center at 30833 Northwestern Highway. The phone number is 851-1366.

A second office, located at 15439 Middlebelt in Livonia, opens its doors this week. The phone number is 425-7557.

"My district offices are intended to be centrally located and as accessible to as many residents of the 11th District as possible," Knollenberg said.

Knollenberg also has been assigned an office in Washington, D.C., located in Suite 218 of the Longworth House Office Building. His phone number in Washington is 202-225-5802.

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