

Numbers game

Can we believe in test scores?

There are lies, there are damn lies . . . and there are statistics. The above saying, attributed to Mark Twain, could be framed and hung on Warren Schroeder's wall after his recent bout with Farmington school officials over how some achievement test scores were interpreted.

As a result of this parent's diligence and his refusal to be put off by confusion that often accompanies education today, the numbers-crunchers in the Farmington District are busy refiguring and refileing its building and district reports.

Schroeder's story was reported by Larry O'Connor on the front page of the Sept. 6 Farmington Observer.

Ah, the numbers. If you're any sort of a decent numbers-cruncher, you'll make those numbers sing your song - preferably in a language the common folk can't understand.

You'll take the numbers - oh, like maybe the scores of the Comprehensive Tests for Basic Skills given to third-, fifth- and eighth-graders in the district - and you'll crunch 'em, bunch 'em, munch 'em and spit 'em into a computer.

Then you'll differentiate, integrate, feed the whole mess through the computer again and print 'em out in a chart that shows (cue the fanfare!) that Farmington kids are doing just fine in school, thank you very much.

You'll have numbers that someone like David York, trustee on the Farmington Board of Education, will be proud to brag about dur-

ing a Tuesday board meeting.

But the numbers didn't impress Warren Schroeder, who noticed something askew when he compared the 1993 reports to the 1994 ones.

Turns out the CTBS figures from 1993 had been lowered by school officials, in some cases by up to 20 percentile points, in this year's reports. Results from '93 were adjusted in order to make them comparable to this year's figures. The difference in time when the kids took the CTBS is the reason for the alteration.

Scores were adjusted according to monthly, instead of weekly norms, and this, too, confused Schroeder. Oakland Schools tabulate CTBS results for the district, as opposed to having the test publisher do it.

Test results are returned faster that way and it saves the district money, officials have said. But the publisher uses weekly, rather than monthly norms, when adjustments have to be made.

Apparently, the weekly way is better. It leads to more accurate adjustments.

These tests are important to all involved in the education equation, especially the parents, who use them to gauge their children's progress in school. Is little Johnny or Jane really learning to read and write? Well, what do the numbers say?

The tests provide a guide that many parents say they no longer get in the report card, which they say has become so vague, perhaps so as not to injure junior's self-esteem.

People need to know that the numbers

Keep local music, theater alive

The Observer's new section, Let's Go!, is a reminder to area residents that live music and theater are an integral part of what makes our communities so special.

While putting the new section together, editors and reporters talked to many local residents involved in the operation of and fund-raising for the Livonia, Redford and Plymouth symphony orchestras, the Farmington Philharmonic, and many community theater groups.

The list of local groups is impressive, but it also sends a message that in order to maintain the number and quality of the groups, the community must support them. The "arts" have struggled the last few years in the wake of budget cuts at the state and federal levels.

Community orchestras - like those in Livonia, Farmington, Plymouth and Redford - have varied degrees of experience in terms of musicians and in terms of history. They play music with individual flair and emotion and they appeal to different audiences.

What area community orchestras all seem to have in common, however, is that financial support is difficult to come by.

Community theaters also require a wide

range of talents to produce their shows. The lights, sound, scenery and performances you see on stage are only the tip of the iceberg.

There are ads to place and tickets to sell, programs to write, posters to design, newsletters to mail, buildings to maintain, insurance to obtain and costumes to sew. All of this work is done by volunteers.

You can help in many ways. The music and theater groups need an audience, so buy a ticket and enjoy yourself. A season schedule appears on page 2B of the new section, Let's Go! You're sure to find a concert or play to suit your taste.

Also, stay tuned for information on fund-raisers for local groups. The orchestras sponsor at least one major fund-raising activity a year.

The LSO Sympony Society presents "Sunday, Songs and Symphony" on Oct. 2 in Laurel Park Place Mall. Tickets at \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door feature food from area restaurants and bakeries, music, prizes, and a silent auction. Proceeds help support the orchestra.

Support these local groups and make sure we keep the music alive and the stage lights shining.



ARKIE HUDKINS

Hates that PUD

I had a little chuckle over your Sept. 1 editorial on the development Mr. Jonna is proposing for 12 Mile and Middlebelt roads today. You made some good (and amusing) points. You at the Farmington Observer must be making your skin even thicker these days. Can you stand one more letter on the subject?

I wanted to share some information that you might find as surprising as I did. You wrote, "you hate this development spiel based on the notion that the development will somehow reduce your property values? Wow, if that happens you might not be able to sell your houses for lots more than they're worth."

That motivation can't explain the opposition of the funky Greencastle subdivision, the only subdivision that abuts the proposed development. Mr. Jonna has estimated that the homes he envisions will sell for more than the average price of a home in our subdivision. He is too modest. The price he says he'll ask is more than any home in our sub except maybe one or two. He also points out that our residents would have better land drainage to improve our property values.

Why, then, did our homeowners show up at meeting after meeting, when they had more fun ways to spend an evening, to show their strong dislike of his proposals?

The answer is, I found, that there is a lot to hate about this PUD.

As the secretary of our subdivision, I decided to survey my neighbors and find out what their real beefs were. Some other ladies and I split up the lots and began calling individual Greencastle property owners one by one.

Every single person (but one and there's always one) listed the terrible current traffic conditions on 12 Mile as their number-one concern.

Your reporter, Bill Coutant, did an excellent job summarizing the findings of environmental engineer Susan Lindquist, who found that the traffic study submitted in support of the PUD was not based on that plan at all.

In addition, it omitted "drive-by" traffic (that is, from outside the neighborhood) to the proposed retail establishment, which was estimated to be 60 percent of the total traffic to the retail outlet. Other baseline figures used did not serve the city well for realistic planning.

What else were the people concerned about? Nearly all hated the idea of a Farmer Jack there. "If Farmington Hills needs another supermarket so badly," one said, "why put it almost right on top of another one?"

One man gave the supermarket this ringing endorsement: "Well, I guess it's better than some all-night bar."

Sure, people are not wild about lot sizes

less than a third the size of our own. Of course they hate the idea of cluster homes, which we're being threatened with if we insist upon maintaining current zoning. But there's more:

They think that the large retention pond and sedimentation basin will serve as a stagnant breeding ground for clouds of mosquitoes. They don't like the fact that nothing prevents this collection of road and yard runoff from going into regulated wetlands.

They fear the Kroger plans will become an empty ghost town of an eyesore over this Farmer Jack open.

They envision a lot of light pollution from the retail establishment and all the street lights they've seen in Mr. Jonna's drawing.

They fear their wells may be affected when all of these basements begin to be laid.

They oppose the tree-screened nature trail behind the unfenced yards at the south end of the sub.

They doubt that the deer that live there now can survive in a greenbelt half again as wide as my living room, although we assured it's a suitable habitat.

I've gone on too much as it is. But you get the idea. Our quality of life here is more important than the improved property values Mr. Jonna hints will come our way with this development.

Gall Jurczyk, secretary
Greencastle Civic & Improvement Association

Tackle 'live' issues

In the morning of Saturday, Sept. 3, I reached into my paper box and low and behold there was a survey from Farmington Hills City Councilman Terry Sever.

This survey is on the 12 Mile and Middlebelt proposed development, a topic which has been put down by many residents in the area and some of the business people.

As in the beer commercial "Why ask why?", the issue is no longer a part of the agenda. It is a fact that it is a dead issue. While some members wish to continue discussion, it should be noted that along the sides of some of the area's roadways is a lot of filth. What ever happened to the city street sweeper?

One of the middle parts at the intersection of 12 Mile Road and Orchard Lake, one could see the filth. Yet our city wished to waste our time about dead issues.

Some things are certain. No sense in asking. Some men and some women love to bare parts of their bodies, the upper parts in particular. We are going to always be paying taxes somewhere.

But to the city councilmembers I say this: Get on to the next item please. The development at 12 Mile and Middlebelt roads is not an issue that should be on the agenda anymore. So move on. Please stop wasting our time.

Vernon C. Klipelnick, Farmington Hills



Trumpet solo: Brian Moon performs with the Livonia Symphony Orchestra during an outdoor concert at Civic Center Park.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION: Do you miss major league baseball?

No. I never go anyway, unless I have a free ticket. Chris Yacubonis Novi	No. Baseball's boring. Jesse Shand Livonia	No. I was never into it anyway. Caron Shand Livonia	No. I never did like it. Wanda Lise Redford Township

We asked this question at Farm Hills Dorus in Farmington Hills.

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— Philip Power