

Educator lauds state proficiency tests

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Michigan's 11th-grade high school proficiency tests won warm praise from a top international educator.

"Those responsible and involved should be congratulated," said Dr. Willard Daggett, president of the International Center for Leadership in Education Inc. based in Schenectady, N.Y.

But Daggett also warned the State Board of Education about how to "avoid sabotage from the normal group of naysayers to any reform effort." The warnings were to inform students, teachers and parents about the tests' purposes and techniques.

Daggett has spoken several times in Michigan to legislators and educators about modernizing the curriculum to make graduates more employable.

He directed the Legislature's

1994 project in which 10 "model schools" created high-standard curricula. He was previously a manager in the New York State Department of Education.

Not only do the HSP tests cover basic concepts in math, science, reading and writing, but Daggett said they require "the application of knowledge and cognitive skills to real-world situations."

A major goal of Michigan's two-year-old tests has been to emphasize multi-step problem solving rather than one-step calculations and memorization. Another goal has been to integrate academic disciplines rather than test them in isolation.

In particular, Daggett praised the communications tests (reading and writing) for "requiring the complex cognitive skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation within real-world problem situations."

For the math and science tests, however, he urged "a greater degree of integration of knowledge."

In general, Daggett called Michigan's tests "similar to European and Asian exams his center has studied."

Daggett said the tests were serving another main purpose by being geared to the core curriculum required for 10th graders.

Daggett gave Michigan these tips for avoiding misunderstandings about and opposition to the HSPT:

■ College admissions officers need to explain how student achievement is measured — test scores, grades, extracurricular activity, teacher recommendations, and standardized college entrance tests.

■ Teachers should be included as tests scorers "so they gain an understanding of what

is really expected of students."

■ Both work-bound and college-bound students need assemblies to hear the rationale for more complex learning.

■ Sample answers from students should be used to demonstrate to parents, teachers and students what is meant by proficiency.

Parents have had their students boycott the HSPT in some suburban districts, fearing that a high score would do no good and a low score would harm one's chance of college admission.

Daggett questioned "the example of the valedictorian who was purportedly refused college admission because of weak HSPT results." He suggested that "an understanding of the full context of that example might lead to a different conclusion."

Plan affects student counts for revenue

Growing school districts would reap the benefits of a plan introduced by three Oakland County lawmakers to phase-out a blended count as the basis for calculating school aid, said Senator Mat Dunaskiss (R-Lake Orion).

Senators Bill Bullard (R-Highland), Mike Bouchard (R-Birmingham) and Dunaskiss led a successful amendment to the K-12 budget legislation recently to change the formula for districts receiving aid based on a blend of student counts from previous and current school years.

"This change is long overdue," Dunaskiss said. "School districts should be compensated on the basis of true enrollment, not some phantom number generated by last year's count."

Currently, students are counted twice, once in September of the current school year and once in February of the previous school year. The district's per-pupil foundation grant is determined by combining 50 percent of pupils counted in September and 50 percent of the pupils counted in February.

"That process robs schools with growing enrollments of state aid for one in every two new students," Dunaskiss said. "It doesn't make sense to penalize districts for their growth."

Under the amended K-12 budget for the fiscal year 1998, the process would change next year with fund allocation based 60 percent on September's count and 40 percent on the previous February. The count would then change by 10 percent each year, through 2002, until funding is based 100 percent on a current student count.

"Oakland County schools have hundreds of new students enrolling each year," Dunaskiss said. "This change would generate more than \$2.5 million next year to meet the critical needs of schools experiencing a growth trend of major proportions."

Dunaskiss said 1998 estimated revenue increases for north Oakland schools include additional funds to Avondale of \$169,715; Clarkston of \$131,875; Lake Orion of \$246,916; and Rochester of \$120,611.



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