

Legislators seeking school test changes

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

State lawmakers want educators to shorten the high school proficiency tests and offer them during the senior year.

They also want to junk the unpopular "proficient," "novice" and "not yet novice" ratings and substitute a system of four rankings — three passing and one failing.

The ratings would appear on a student's official transcript but not on the diploma, under a bill being drafted in a House Education subcommittee in Lansing.

"The High School Proficient Tests have had unintended consequences," said Rep. Rose Bagdikian, D-Davison. "We see children not taking foreign languages or the arts."

The reason, she said, is that giving the tests in 11th grade, as currently done, pushes school districts to offer test subjects such as government in 10th grade. "They'll have to have all this in the 10th grade," added Rep. Clyde LeTarte, R-Jackson. "We're forcing material back in the curriculum."

On a split 5-2 vote, the panel amended its draft bill to require the state Department of Education to administer the tests in the first semester of 12th grade. The tests then will determine what students have learned by the end of the 11th grade instead of the end of the 10th.

The subcommittee met Sept. 25 and is scheduled to meet again at noon Oct. 1 on the fourth floor of the State Capitol in Lansing.

Paul Bielawski, supervisor of curriculum development for the Department of Education, said 11th grade was chosen for testing because 10th grade is "the last time we have all the kids together. The tests are focused on all kids," he told the panel. "We don't have all kids taking chemistry, biology and physics. So we test for health science, not biology."

"We test for algebraic content, but not binomial equations. All kids take civics, but many don't take economics, and some districts don't even offer it," Bielawski said.

"My preference is to do it (administer tests) on the last day of the senior year," said LeTarte, a former community college president.

Jim Ballard, of the Michigan High School Principals Association, said the test shouldn't be offered too late in the 12th grade. "There's a general feeling

for one additional chance to take the tests," he said, adding that one-third of students are not test takers.

The bill will ask the Department of Education to "provide more specific feedback to students, parents and the schools to be used in improving the students' performance."

Tests are administered in mathematics, science, reading and writing. A social studies test is to be added later.

Subcommittee members generally agreed the tests should be administered in less than 11 hours, a subject of much complaint during last summer's hearings. But they didn't set a number in their draft bill.

Meanwhile, the State Board of Education voted 7-0 recently to shorten testing time by 45 minutes by eliminating part 2 of the writing test.

Other key points approved by the subcommittee:

■ The department should use only Michigan educators for scoring "open-ended questions" and the writing component.

■ The department should recommend a statewide comprehensive professional development plan for educators in understanding core academic content standards.

■ Schools should give re-takes in the same academic year.

■ The department should develop a correlation between the MEAP (assessment tests given to fifth and eighth graders) and the high school proficiency tests.

Here is the department's description of what a "proficient" student should know about science by the end of 10th grade:

■ "A student who scores within the proficient range in science demonstrates the ability to use, construct and reflect on scientific knowledge. The student:

■ "Demonstrates knowledge of earth and space science, life science and physical science.

■ "Uses his or her knowledge to describe and explain real world objects, systems, or events; and to predict future events or observations.

■ "Develops solutions to problems by interpreting text, graphs, tables, pictures or other representations of scientific knowledge.

■ "Is able to 'step back' and analyze or reflect upon his/her own knowledge using either theoretical or empirically based arguments and describe the limitations of his/her own knowledge and scientific knowledge in general."

Hearings to air criteria for college admissions

State Capitol capsules:

Appointments

Gov. John Engler has appointed:

Dr. Leon Herschfus, a Southfield dentist, to the Board of Podiatric Medicine and Surgery, which provides for the licensure and examination of podiatrists and podiatric surgeons. His term runs until June 30, 2001.

George Wolff, Ph.D., of Farmington Hills, to the state Environmental Science Board, which advises the governor and departments on natural resources issues. He is principal scientist with the General Motors Public Policy Center. His term expires Aug. 6, 2000.

Dick Gabrys, of Bloomfield Hills, to the State Board of Accountancy representing professionals. Gabrys is vice chair of Deloitte & Touche LLP. His term expires June 30, 2001.

Preference hearing

Four Republican state representatives will taken public comment Monday in their probe of preferential treatment of student applicants at the University of Michigan.

"This public hearing is intended to allow individuals who have been damaged by preferential treatment policies at U-M or elsewhere a chance to speak out in public," said the leader, Rep. David Jayo of Macomb County.

The hearing is scheduled for 6-8 p.m. in the Shelby Township Hall, 52700 Van Dyke, just south of 24 Mile Road in Macomb County.

Joining Jayo in planning a federal civil rights suit against U-M are Reps. Greg Kaza of Rochester Hills, Deborah Why-

man of Canton, and Michelle McManus of Leelanau.

In addition, Jayo is sponsoring a ballot proposal similar to California Proposition 209, which voters in 1996 approved to end affirmative action.

Meanwhile, Whyman branded as "insincere" the statement of incoming U-M President Lee Bollinger that he will end the practice of preferential admission status to minorities.

"Bollinger has indicated that he wishes to increase the admissions staff at U-M in order to give 'personal attention to each candidate rather than relying on formulas,' Bollinger is trying to keep minority references in place without leaving a paper trail. . . He wants to discriminate on a personal, one-to-one basis," said Whyman.

College hearings

The House Higher Education Committee will conduct hearings on college-related issues Monday in Detroit and Oct. 3 at the University of Michigan-Flint.

Rep. Deborah Cherry, D-Burton, said the focus will be families who have purchased tuition guarantee contracts from the Michigan Education Trust (MET).

The panel also will look at federal and state policies on the impact of welfare reform on college attendance.

Monday's hearing will run from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in rooms B and C of the Wayne State University McGregor Memorial Conference Center, 490 W. Ferry Mall.

The Oct. 3 hearing will be in rooms A and B of the Harding-Mott University Center, UM-Flint, 303 E. Kearsley.

Taxpayers get slight millage decrease

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Homeowners might be able to get pizza with their tax savings under the Oakland County budget approved for 1998.

But they'll have to settle for a slice, rather than a whole pizza.

The owner of a \$200,000 home, for example, will realize about \$3 a year under the \$554 million budget approved Thursday by the Oakland County Board of Commissioners.

The savings will result as the county's Millage Reduction and Stabilization Fund is eliminated over the next four years.

The owner of the same \$200,000 home would have realized \$12 a year if the \$4.3 million fund had been eliminated in one year instead of spread out

over four.

While some commissioners wanted the higher tax cut, all but one commissioner — John Garfield, R-Rochester Hills — voted for the budget with the \$3 tax cut.

Those commissioners agreed with county executive L. Brooks Patterson, whose office prepared the budget, that the larger cut now might necessitate raising taxes in a year or two if the economy took a severe down turn.

Oakland is currently in excellent financial shape, according to Robert J. Daddow, who as director of management and budget is the main architect of the 1998 budget.

But there could be difficulty, Daddow insisted, if problems like jail overcrowding required

'We'd rather give a small reduction, so we don't have to have a tax hike if things get tight.'

Robert J. Daddow
—director of management and budget

an influx of cash. "We'd rather give a small reduction, so we don't have to have a tax hike if things get tight," he said.

Commissioner Sue Ann Douglas, R-Rochester and chair of the county board's finance committee, said the new budget — like previous budgets — represents compromise. "We held hours of hearings," she said.


"There was considerable discussion, but in the end we were able to agree."

One who disagreed, however, was Garfield. He was particularly unhappy about Oakland allocating \$3 million as the local match for improvements for ramps on I-75 for access to the new Chrysler headquarters in Auburn Hills.

Garfield found it incongruous that Oakland officials would allocate \$3 million for the benefit of Chrysler while quibbling about a \$3 tax cut for homeowners.

"I'm ashamed of my fellow Republicans," he said during one of the budget hearings.

Some of those colleagues, however, said the \$3 million had been promised in negotiations to the auto maker



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at Bill Knapps
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Farmington Hills
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Thursday, October 2
2:00 p.m.
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