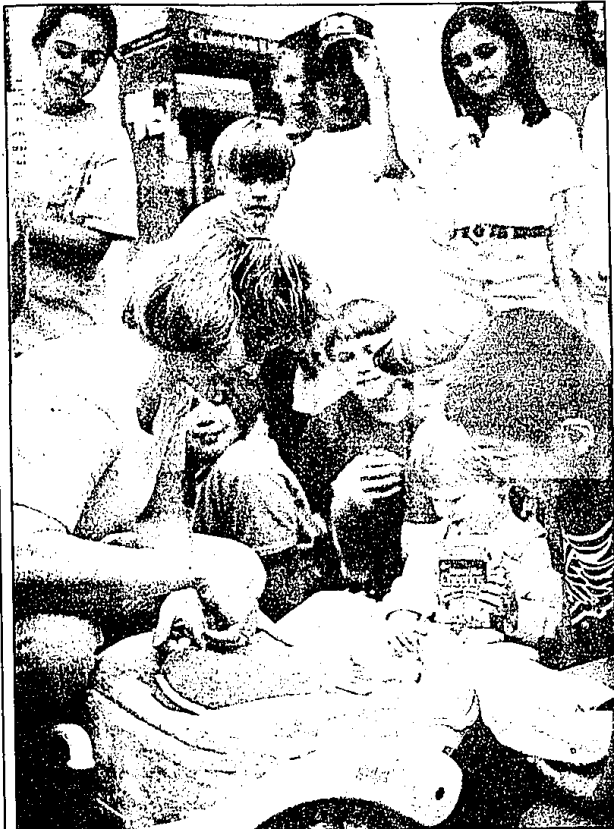


Oh, baby!



Here she is: Teacher Molly Gray introduces her 6-week-old baby daughter, Taylor, and 23-month-old son, Kyle (with cereal), to her fourth-fifth grade split class at Gill Elementary School. Gray came back to visit the class, from which she recently took a leave of absence, in order to deliver her baby. Taking over her class for the rest of the year was her father, Lincoln Avery.

C'ville officials struggle to deal with disappointing MEAP scores

With respect to Frank Sinatra, the Clarenceville Board of Education these days must be singing the words of one of "Ol' Blue Eyes' great songs. "Riding high in April, shot down in May" is how the trustees feel as they recall the pride of receiving one good set of state MEAP scores in April and disappointment after another recently released set showed a downturn.

"I was flabbergasted; this took us by surprise," said Jim Lancaster, assistant superintendent for instruction and the person in charge of Clarenceville's curriculum.

Michigan Educational Assessment Program scores unveiled in May gave Clarenceville a lot to cheer about.

Fourth and seventh graders who took the 1998 reading and math tests did better than students who took the same tests in 1997, according to April results.

Then, the state released scores earned statewide by fifth- and eighth graders on the science and writing tests. On all four tests, the scores plunged, worse than scores earned by last year's fifth and eighth graders.

"This is a definite embarrassment to me personally, especially to see what happened in science," said Superintendent Tom Tattan. "I didn't expect it. I take full responsibility for this."

After swearing in new trustee Bryan Bentley Thursday, the trustees spent time trying to figure out what went wrong on the two tests.

Officials cited several possible villains:

- Personnel changes at Botsford Elementary and

Clarenceville Middle School caused emphasis on the MEAP to get lost in the shuffle. Botsford got a new principal, Joe Schiffman, who was previously in charge of the science program at Botsford.

"There were important staff changes, but that alone doesn't explain it," Lancaster said.

■ The MEAP-driven curriculum is not being taught in the classrooms.

"We must make sure that the curriculum that's on paper is what's being taught in the classroom," Lancaster said.

■ A large number of students came up short by just a few points. In a tiny district such as Clarenceville, a shortfall like this can heavily affect final scores, Lancaster said.

"If we could get kids to answer five more correct, that would bring scores up to the 40-50 percent range, he said.

■ Classroom teachers didn't stress the importance of the tests, especially since Clarenceville scores have climbed the ladder the last couple of years.

"Do we have faculty who's telling the kids, 'These tests are not significant?'" asked newly re-elected trustee Gary Garrison.

"Do they feel they take away classroom time from other things?"

■ Students themselves don't place much importance on the tests.

"After we've done all the work in aligning the curriculum, after we've reviewed everything and found out that teachers covered everything, then what?" asked trustee Ronald Silye. "I know that's a loaded question. If we're

doing everything, and the kids aren't getting it, that sounds like there's a lot of kids who need help."

"If students think the scores mean nothing, are not important, then the district must turn that attitude around," Garrison said. "The scores don't reflect the education we're giving these kids," he said.

■ With science kits now used in middle school, teachers may now rely too much on the kits and not back it up with enough traditional classroom instruction.

"Have the kits augmented the science class, or replaced it?" asked trustee John Kanoy.

Ensuring better scores

Board President Linda Brandemihl, whose term has ended and whose last time at the board table was Thursday, posed one of her last questions as trustee: "What assessment tool do we have in place to make sure the curriculum is being delivered?"

"That's a large piece of the puzzle," she added. "How do we know we are teaching what we have written on paper?"

It's a question Lancaster said the district "needed to work out administratively."

Clarenceville fifth graders scored 26.4 on the 1998 MEAP science test and 74.0 on the writing test. Last year's scores were 41.1 and 86.5 respectively.

Clarenceville eighth graders scored 14.4 on the 1998 MEAP science test and 55.1 on the writing test. Last year's scores were 23.9 and 86.4 respectively.

The district includes parts of Redford, Livonia and Farmington Hills.

AGENDAS

Farmington City Council
City Hall, 23600 Liberty Street
8 p.m. Monday, June 14
474-5500

- Agenda items include:
- Recommendation for Court Facility Planning Committee.
 - Public Safety renovation contract.
 - Amendment to water and sewer rates.
 - Reappointments to the traffic and safety board.

Farmington School Board
Schulman Building, 32600 Shawwassee
7:30 p.m. Tuesday, June 15
489-3300

- Agenda items include:
- PTA Council year-end report.
 - Approval of curriculum/textbook recommendations.
 - Approval of 1998-99 budget.
 - Award of bids for Dunckel Middle School (Phase 2); wiring for Kenbrook, Gill, Longacre elementarys.

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