

E d u c a t i o n

Oregon eighth graders boost math scores

A 1996 national mathematics test shows that Oregon eighth graders scored significantly higher than they did in 1990. Less impressive but still above the national average were the scores of Oregon fourth graders.

Oregon eighth graders scored 276, five points high than in 1990, on the test administered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. That's a significant increase, according to NAEP.

"I am pleased that the eighth graders comparisons show we are climbing up the ladder of higher achievement," said State Schools Supt. Norma Paulus. "We know that we are headed in the right direction. We must stay the course and intensify our efforts."

Paulus said the national test validates the results of Oregon's state assessment which showed similar gains for eighth graders between 1991 and 1996.

NAEP ranks four levels of math

achievement: below basic, basic, proficient and advanced. Oregon eighth graders advanced in each of the top three levels with a smaller percentage in the below basic level.

"It's not just our top students who raised our score," said Paulus. "Oregon students at all achievement levels have improved."

"It's remarkable that Oregon accomplished this growth in the face of severe budget cuts and record enrollment," she added.

Eight states scored significantly higher than Oregon on the eighth grade test. They are North Dakota, Maine, Minnesota, Iowa, Montana, Wisconsin, Nebraska and Connecticut. Oregon tied for 14th among the 40 participating states. The national average was 271.

"We need to build a solid foundation in the early grades," said Paulus. "It's critical that we provide more training for teachers. That's why we held a Mathematics Summit for

teachers in February." She said there was room for 400 teachers, but 800 requested the training. So a second summit will be held in April.

At the Mathematics Summit, Wells Fargo announced it will provide \$300,000 in grants to school district to help students meet the new high mathematics standards.

In Oregon, 2,323 eighth graders in 98 schools and 2,233 fourth graders in 95 schools participated in the national test. Students were selected based on a random sample of a cross section of Oregon students. NAEP in June will provide a more comprehensive report for Oregon. Among other things, the report will list characteristics about students and teachers and describe how various factors - some outside the classroom - affect achievement.

Oregon eighth graders also took the NAEP science test last year. Results of that exam will be announced in May.

Glickman announces pilot Program For School Lunches

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman announced a pilot program that will provide additional purchasing power to states that administer the National School Lunch Program.

Glickman made the announcement at a meeting of the American School Food Service Association. "The program -- which will be piloted in South Carolina and Texas -- will allow USDA to use its considerable purchasing power to buy foods on behalf of the states," Glickman said. "Purchases will be made with state and local funds provided under the National School Lunch Program. This is yet another example of how federal and state governments can work in partnership to save money and improve services."

Glickman noted that, for a number of years, states and local school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program have expressed an interest

in the Department purchasing foods for them. In accordance with the national School Lunch Act, USDA is mandated to purchase prescribed levels of foods for use in the school lunch program. Because USDA purchases in such large quantity, it can buy at significantly lower costs -- as much as 5 percent to 10 percent lower -- than states or local schools.

In November 1994, the Healthy Meals for Healthy Americans Act amended the NSLA and provided authority for the Secretary of Agriculture to enter into agreements with states to use funds available to them under the NSLA to purchase food for their participating schools.

"State interest in the pilot program is high," Glickman said. "They're excited about the potential this program offers to better use their shrinking funds and improve their programs. Using the Department's substantial purchasing power should lower the cost of

foods purchased by states and local schools."

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service and Farm Service Agency hosted a roundtable discussion in May 1990, where representative from 10 states provided valuable input on how to best structure the pilot program to be responsive to state and local needs, including delivery schedules and method of payment.

Items identified by Glickman for potential purchase include bowl-packed cereal in individual serving size packages, assorted fruit juices in 4-ounce containers, fruit cups, and low-fat shredded and sliced processed American cheese.

"After the pilot is evaluated, the program can be offered throughout the country," Glickman said. "This is good, common-sense procurement policy and it allows us to help state to get more high-quality and nutritious foods for their school lunch and other feeding programs."

OASIS and Sunset High team up for Intergenerational learning

OASIS (Older Adult Service and Information System) and Sunset High School are teaming up to offer a unique intergenerational learning experience called "Bytes Build Bridges: An Intergenerational Computer Education Project."

Through this project older adults are entering the computer age, and teens are performing valuable community service.

The project "turns the tables" on the typical intergenerational mentoring program. This time the mentors are high school students sharing their expertise with members of an older generation. Fif-

teen student volunteers and 15 OASIS members meet for an hour-long session each Tuesday afternoon from 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., March 11 through April 29th in the high school computer lab. (No class on 3/25.) The seven-week class offers individualized instruction in computer basics.

OASIS participants in other cities were enthusiastic about their experience. "One-on-one tutoring is terrific," said an OASIS member. "It was because of this additional support that I finally signed up for a computer course." Another senior adult reported, "My personal tutor is very informed and has already helped

me more than you would imagine."

Student volunteers shared their enthusiasm, too. One student said, "I enjoyed helping the OASIS members learn how to use the computer. I found it challenging, yet rewarding to teach something that has become second nature to me." Another

said, "I thought working with older adults might be a little difficult...but it was fairly easy because my OASIS partner is persistent and really wants to learn."

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OASIS is a national education organization designed to challenge

and enrich the lives of men and women 55 and older. Through stimulating classes and volunteer programs, OASIS provides through OASIS centers in 26 cities across the United States. In Portland, OASIS is sponsored by Legacy Health System, BlueCross BlueShield of Oregon and Meier & Frank. The local center is located in the downtown Meier & Frank store.

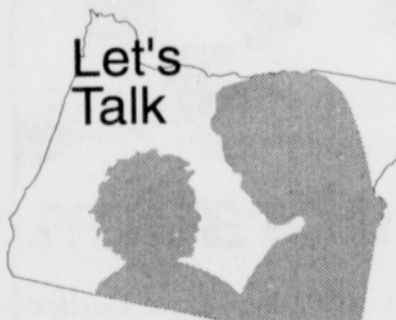
National essay scholarship competition

Through a national essay competition known as Project: Learn MS '97, high school and college students can compete for separate \$8,000 college scholarship awards and raise funds to assist those suffering from multiple sclerosis. Sponsored by the Multiple Sclerosis Association of America, Project: Learn MS '97 is an awareness/scholarship program open to high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors; and college freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. Official registration forms are available at high school guidance offices or by calling 1-800-Learn MS.

Now entering its fourth year, MSAA's Project: Learn MS '97 encourages students to write a 500-1000 word essay on multiple sclerosis, its effect on the family, and how society can improve life for the physically challenged. MSAA will appoint two independent panels to judge the essays separately for high school and college levels.

All essays must include an official registration form, a minimum of \$7.50 in prepaid sponsorship, and must be postmarked by April 11, 1997. Students are encouraged to raise additional sponsor money to win various prizes.

Know as the most common neurological disorder of young adults, multiple sclerosis affects as many as 500,000 Americans. Symptoms can include blindness, extreme fatigue, tremors, and varying degrees of paralysis. At present, there is no known cause, cure or prevention for MS. MSAA is a national non-profit health care agency providing direct patient care programs and services to assist those suffering from MS. MSAA services include peer counseling, support groups, free loan of therapeutic equipment, barrier-free housing, symptom management research and therapies, educational literature, no-cost MRI's and other vital patient programs.



Thinking About Thinking

Let's have a "little tink," as Einstein would say as he pondered a stubborn problem. Let us, for a moment, think about thinking, how our minds work, how we think, learn, remember.

We have had what some have called a "breakthrough" in discovering how kids learn, even comparing it to the educational equivalent of life-saving vaccines.

The discovery some 30 years ago occurred something like this: Researchers studied and compared experts and novices in various areas to figure out how experts got to be that way. What were their thinking processes? Researchers then laid out the frameworks of how experts came to gain their understanding, and how they used their knowledge. Using these learning frameworks, novices could then build their learning, developing and becoming experts.

A defining difference found between the novice and the expert was that the novice is naive about what they're dealing with. The word "clueless," might apply. Novices see only small parts of the larger and complex whole; they don't notice all the critical information that they must have to solve a problem. At school, of course, all students delving into new subjects are novices. But over time, in an instructional atmosphere that gives the student's brain the time to mature and notice, to encode and to modify memory accordingly, students move through enlightening stages from novice to expert.

Now comes the first results from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) that tested a half-million kids in 41 nations at five different grades. Kids were examined. Classes videotaped. Curriculum analyzed. Policies probed.

In the initial results that pertain

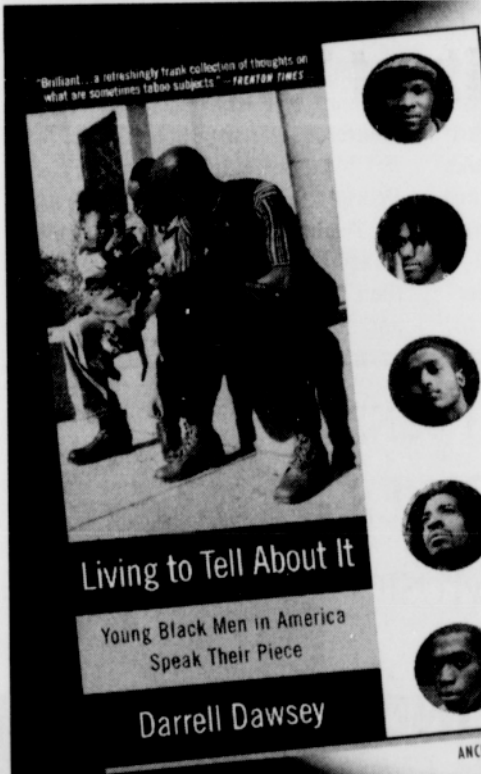
to only the eighth grade, our math scores overall were below the average of the other TIMSS countries, although there were some areas of promise.

The findings are illuminating. Japan was the highest scorer in math, using instructional approaches similar to those now on our academic-reform table. Although TIMSS researchers caution against drawing any solid conclusions without further research on the instructional approaches of other high scoring countries, this grueling examination showed clear differences between American and Japanese instruction.

The Japanese approach to teaching math is laser-focused and centered on student understanding of mathematical concepts—narrow, thorough. Our approach has been a mile wide, an inch deep—cover more, faster. Just now our current educational reform efforts are building on what we know about how students learn—too early to have an impact in this study. And although most U.S. math teachers said they were aware of the reform methods, few said that they use them. The point is that Japanese teachers teach math the way that our National Council of Teachers of Mathematics says that we should teach math. They've said it since 1989; yet we struggle with widespread implementation.

TIMSS results may cause reform critics to re-think their position, and the public to re-think how we teach and what we teach in math. We have a conspicuous "clue." Yes, it's time for a "little tink."

This column is provided as a public service by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, a nonprofit institution working with schools and communities in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington.

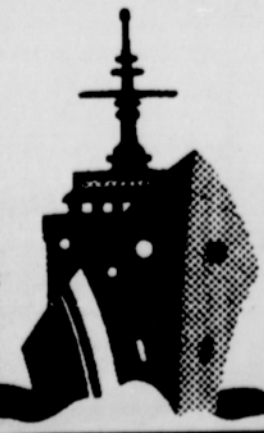


The statistics about young black men are familiar: Homicide is their #1 killer; one fourth are in jail, on parole, or probation; and their rates of unemployment, teen fatherhood, educational dropout—and death—exceed those of any other demographic group. *Living to Tell About It* is the first book to look beyond the statistics at the real lives of most young black men in America today. Journalist Darrell Dawsey traveled across country, listening to young men talk about their childhoods, relationships with parents and women, sexuality, self-respect, spirituality, and ambitions. The result is a portrait of a generation facing manifold challenges and dilemmas of black manhood—and living to tell about it.

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