

What do standardized test scores mean?

Standardized test scores, like everything from labor negotiations to soccer, are assuming an ever greater importance in the life of the Madison Public Schools.

The tests allow the Madison School District to compare itself against the performance of a national student sample. In Madison, the tests are given to all fifth and eighth graders in reading and math, and to third graders in reading, listening and word analysis.

This year's test results, released last month, show that overall Madison students scored above the national average on all seven tests, and that the four-year decline in scores has been arrested.

But while the educators are pleased with the overall performance, they remain concerned with and puzzled and bothered by the scores recorded by Madison's eighth graders, particularly in reading.

In reading, 32 percent of Madison's 2,341 eighth graders scored below average in the test, while in math 24

percent were recorded as below average.

For fifth graders, 25 percent were reading below average while 24 percent were below average in math.

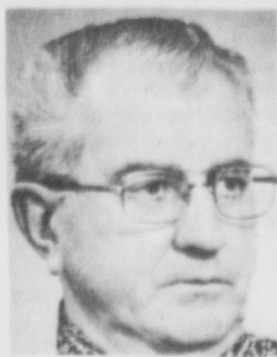
The third graders out-performed both the fifth or eighth graders.

The test results show a wide disparity across the city. For example, only 17 percent of the Memorial area eighth graders scored below average in reading, while 45 percent were below average in reading in the East area schools.

To get a better understanding of Madison's testing program — and its meaning — The Wisconsin State Journal sought interviews with several school administrators — Lee Hansen, director of Research and development; Don Hafeman, director of East area schools; Gary Wright, director of Memorial area schools; Conan Edwards, director of West area schools; and Kenneth Jensen, director of Lafollette area schools.

They were interviewed by Education Reporter Richard Haws.

Their edited responses follow.



Conan Edwards



Gary Wright



Lee Hansen



Kenneth Jensen



Don Hafeman

Administrators give opinions

By Richard Haws
Of The State Journal

Q: What is Madison's overall standardized test philosophy? Why use them at all?

Hansen: That poses somewhat of a dilemma for us. On the one hand, I think we use standardized tests because we sense that the community demands them. But frankly, there are other kinds of testing going on in the district which we, as a professional staff, feel more comfortable with.

Hafeman: Standardized tests give us only a very general overview of what's going on in our school system. Other tests, which are based on different concepts, can give us more specific information like where are our strengths and weaknesses.

Hansen: For example, the results of specific testing in mathematics in the fifth and eighth grade in East High School area schools uncovered a weakness in fractions and division. Specific steps have now been taken to make corrections.

Q: Is there concern that entire schools may be evaluated solely on their performance on standardized tests?

Hansen: There is no doubt that they are. What is not recognized in the standardized test results is that they reflect a lot more than simply what the school is responsible for. Unless some cautious interpretation of those results is done, we can over-generalize about them.

Q: What are some of the factors affecting standardized test scores?

Hansen: Factors which can have an impact on test performance are

mobility (the number of students who move into and out of a school), cultural background, socio-economic group, stability of the family and the type of skills the pupil comes to school with as a kindergartner.

Hafeman: The problem is that all of those factors are then related to low scores and that equals being bad. That doesn't mean that. They are just indicators of need. For example, we may have to spend more time in a school where tests are low talking about social interaction simply because youngsters are coming to us with very poor skills in that area. If there's a lot of fighting on the playground, you're not going to get the basics quite so soon because other things are getting in the way. Our job as educators is to find out which factors are academically related, and what our role is in making modifications.

Q: One concern of the community is that more of the older students are scoring below average on the standardized tests than are the younger students. Why?

Jensen: One thing not to forget is that the situation is not unique to Madison. It is happening across the country. There is something more universal about it than simply something you can pinpoint right here in a particular Madison school, or the Madison School District.

Hafeman: One possible reason might be television. There are no confirmed studies I know of which clearly indicate that the lack of reading fostered by television is leading to lower reading scores. But intuitively I think I see that, and I think our teachers see that. But I'm not sure. So therefore, it's hard for

it to serve as a qualifier. Another thing that we have done is open up the number of choices the kids have as they go into middle and high schools. There were times ten years ago when high school students took four subjects plus physical education. But since 1967, with the move to comprehensive high schools, we have kids in courses that do not necessarily stress reading and math, but some other kinds of skills where we don't really test.

Hansen: I want to emphasize that we are concerned about some of the scores which have emerged on the eighth grade level. But one of the things which has gotten lost is the significant math improvement which has occurred at several middle schools, like Schenk, Sherman, and Marquette Middle Schools.

Hafeman: Here's another point. Many times the community takes the test score and makes the assumption that the teachers and school are not doing the job. That may be a reasonable assumption, but just personally, I have never seen teachers work harder to develop programs which are more sensitive to kids. Teachers are as puzzled as we are many times as to why those scores continually come out as they do.

Edwards: In the last few years, Madison has had a strong influx of students coming from areas where communication skills — speaking and listening — are not highly developed. Many of these students also have achievement levels considerably below those of students who came up through the Madison schools. I would theorize that some of these newer students, not having benefited from earlier learning

programs, are now scoring low on the tests and bringing our averages down.

Wright: By the same token, I think we're finding that the range in achievement levels of pupils entering kindergarten today is greater than ever before. On the one hand, we have some students beginning kindergarten with little preparation for school while at the same time, some are coming better prepared than ever before. And one of the reasons may be television.

Hafeman: Sure. Do kids watch Sesame St. as a matter of a babysitting act, or is it a learning experience which is added to by the parents?

Q: What about expanding the testing program to the high school level?

Hansen: I don't think there are any of us here who would be theoretically or conceptually opposed to doing high school testing. But one of the concerns we have is motivating the high school students to do their best on the test.

Q: Do you ever see a time when more comparable scores will be reported across the city?

Edwards: I think that since we have no control over a child in his most fruitful years — those prior to entry into school — that I can see no way but that we will continue to have this difference accentuated.

Hansen: But one thing to remember is that if you look at any school in the district, you will find children who are scoring above average; you will find gifted children; you will find children with learning problems. I think there's a tendency to stereotype schools and say this school has all one kind of student while that school has all another kind. There's variety in every school.

Metro

Wisconsin State Journal

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Joni Mitchell heard on both sides now

By David W. Chandler
Written for the State Journal

Joni Mitchell's quid pro quo with the forces of electricity finally brought her, with the "Court and Spark" album: and the resultant tour (which became the "Miles Of Aisles" LP), the kind of mass adulation she both loves and hates.

But that was two years ago, and her concert Sunday night at the Dane County Coliseum — although cast in the clothes of her appearance here in January of 1974 and more successful financially with a sell-out 8,682 devotees on hand, was considerably less glistening.

The opening tarnish was provided by the LA Express, which began the show with their characteristic studio jazz. The Express has lost ace hornplayer and arranger Tom Scott, whose style was derivative (mostly from the late King Curtis) but distinctive, and they are as technically competent but uninspiring as ever — though now thin and reedy rather than occasionally piercing, as when Scott was in charge.

Their work with Mitchell lacked the carefully crafted fire of the Mitchell/Scott charts, and they blatantly trampled on "Love Or Money," "Free Man In Paris," and the new "In France They Kiss On Main Street."

The contrast is critical, because Mitchell is a singer of words and must be heard and understood (or memorized) to be effective.

The problem is doubled by Mitchell's lack of musical gifts — her pitch is fuzzy, her tone cloudy, her voice — with

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the constant slide into the head — irritating, and her melodies and rhythms largely cut from the same cloth.

But unobstructed — as on "Big Yellow Taxi," "Real Good For Free," and the new "Coyote" and "Harry's House — Centerpiece," Mitchell's lyrics shine with wit and understanding. "Taxi" was sharp and biting (and not self-concerned as so much of her work is). "Real Good" colored her career ambivalence, "Coyote" her romantic determination and final vulnerability, and "Harry's House" her way with characters imprisoned in amber.

Other solos, however, did not work as well — the new "Shades of Scarlett Conquering" and "When Furry Sings The Blues" were little more than different words to melodies and lyric situations that have become Mitchell cliches.

In fact, Mitchell had an air of backing away from the spunky underpinning that made her music palatable to persons outside her cult following, and pointing back in the direction of the painfully pre-occupied "Blue." Some kind of continuing growth is certainly called for, but Mitchell will have a hard time holding attention if she turns that way.

Woman robbed by purse snatcher

A purse snatcher took an undetermined amount of cash from a 59-year-old woman at a bus stop at Breary and Johnson Sts. about 9:15 p.m. Sunday.

Witnesses said the man first acted like he was waiting for a bus and then grabbed the woman's purse and ran in the direction of E. Dayton St. Police were looking for a white male in his early 20s, about 5-foot 9 inches tall, with blond hair and wearing a grey parka and jeans.

Aid urged to end tobacco farming

MILWAUKEE (UPI) — Howard Temin, 41, University of Wisconsin-Madison cancer researcher who won the Nobel Prize in 1975 for research into possible links between viruses and cancer, says the government should develop a program to help farmers who stop harvesting tobacco.

Temin, who said about one-third of male cancer deaths are the result of lung cancer, said the government ought to consider giving subsidies to tobacco farmers or other forms of help to encourage them to stop harvesting a crop responsible for thousands of cancer deaths every year.

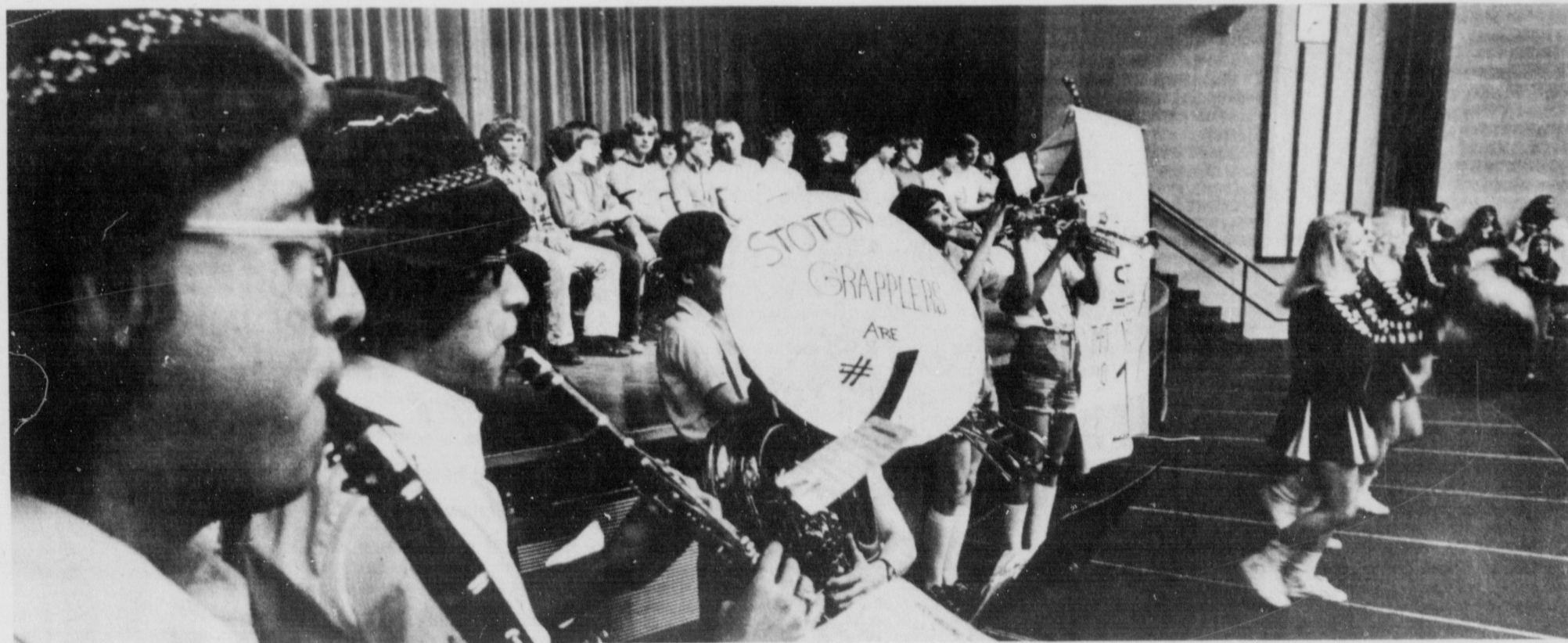
Temin was in Milwaukee to receive the Founders Day Award annually presented by the University of Wisconsin Alumni Club of Milwaukee.

Pedestrian deaths

Fewer pedestrians were killed in Wisconsin last year than in any of the previous 10 years, according to Motor Vehicle Division figures.

John Radcliffe, highway safety coordinator, said 127 pedestrians died in 1975.

He said 73 of the deaths occurred on urban roads, 54 on rural.



Spelling is hard, wrestling is easy and celebrating state championships is a habit for Stoughton.

—State Journal photo by Joseph W. Jackson III

Stoughton cheers a very pleasant habit

By Steven T. Lovejoy
Of The State Journal

STOUGHTON — "Well, that's it, I guess."

For Andy Rein, his teammates on Stoughton's repeat state high school wrestling championship team, and for most of the city, "it" was the end of a very long year.

While the cheers were there and the praise flowed freely, the frenzy of the tournament finals was replaced Sunday with a friendly sense of fulfillment — and maybe just a little relief.

After a full year of being the No. 1

ranked team in the state, the pressure finally lifted Sunday when Coach Vern Pieper turned over a shining new trophy to Stoughton High Athletic Director Bill Koenig in welcoming ceremonies in the high school auditorium.

Pieper, now a full-blown local legend courtesy of a school Pieper-Power chant, said the pressure of the No. 1 ranking wasn't unexpected after last year's championship — "you know how nervous we get about these things."

"It's sometimes tough to keep the kids as loose as you like," he said, smiling.

A gracious winner, Pieper had high praise for the Mineral Point wrestlers who finished in second place, two points behind Stoughton.

"They (Mineral Point) just don't know when to give up — they just keep going," Pieper said. "They'll probably be rated No. 1 next year."

Handing Mineral Point that compliment, presumably along with the pressure, Pieper also promised Stoughton would "start pecking away at them."

But with two straight trophies in hand and state championships in four of the

last nine years, it doesn't look as if Stoughton will voluntarily give up its winning ways.

"This is getting to be a habit, a wonderful habit," Doug Stockstad of the Stoughton Chamber of Commerce crowded to the packed auditorium. "We should just tape record this and play it back next year."

Wrestling announcer Larry Lynch echoed the sentiment: "We're going to be staying there (on top) so you might as well get used to the idea."

Speaking for the loyal-but-vanquished

opposition, Sun Prairie coach Bob Downing "threatened" to take his team to an easier conference like the Big Eight if his second place conference finishers don't win in 1977.

For Andy Rein, who clinched his second individual championship, and most of the rest of the senior-dominated team, the pressure is off. Their job is done.

For Stoughton there is always next year, but for now all that remains is to paint a '76 on the end of the sign leading into the city that proclaims the home of the state's finest wrestling team.