

Bold Student Testing Program Under Way In Soquel Schools

By Wally Trabing

The Soquel Union school district, already recognized for its progressive thinking in school planning, has stepped into the educative lead again with a bold student testing program amazingly detailed to plug trouble spots in the processes of learning.

Many schools give these achievement and mental maturity tests, but the results are usually kept as hush-hush as a prototype rocket plane.

Superintendent Paul Walters and John Bell, principal of the Capitola school, Tuesday night revealed the results of tests taken last October in a frank and open discussion before the board of trustees.

They presented the good with the bad by means of charted graphs of the grade levels involved. But what pleased the trustees was the plan, already under development, to make an extensive breakdown of the achievement and mental maturity level of each grade, each class, and each student.

This will give the administrator, the principal, the teachers, the students and the parents a picture each year of the student, class, and grade academic level.

A program such as this takes a lot of explaining. There are ramifications in each phase. But, Bell explained, the results do indicate areas where adjustments appear to be needed in the subject matter, method of instruction, and student effort.

Walters, who gave Bell most of the credit for the statistical development, said the tests were given to grades four through eight. The mental maturity tests, of course geared to each grade level, confronts the students with sight situations and thought problems with which they should be familiar at their age level.

The achievement test covers subjects in which students have been schooled up to their grade level.

Walters said a test was given to the third grade last year "which just didn't work out at all," probably, he said, because of the lack of learning experience at that grade level. A different type of test will be tried next year, he said. This year's test was too advanced, he said.

Bell said total results of the tests revealed the overall achievement picture rests almost exactly at or above the national norm. This norm was reached by giving the same tests to some 65000 students across the United States in the last few years.

Bell first presented the results by grades. Subject areas include: 1. Reading; vocabulary and comprehension. 2. Arithmetic; reasoning and fundamentals. 3. Language; spelling and grammar.

Here are the general indications of the graph lines by grades.

Eighth grade: above average in vocabulary and arithmetic reasoning; below average in spelling; average in the rest of the categories.

Seventh grade: above average in both reading categories and in arithmetic reasoning; below average in arithmetic fundamentals and spelling.

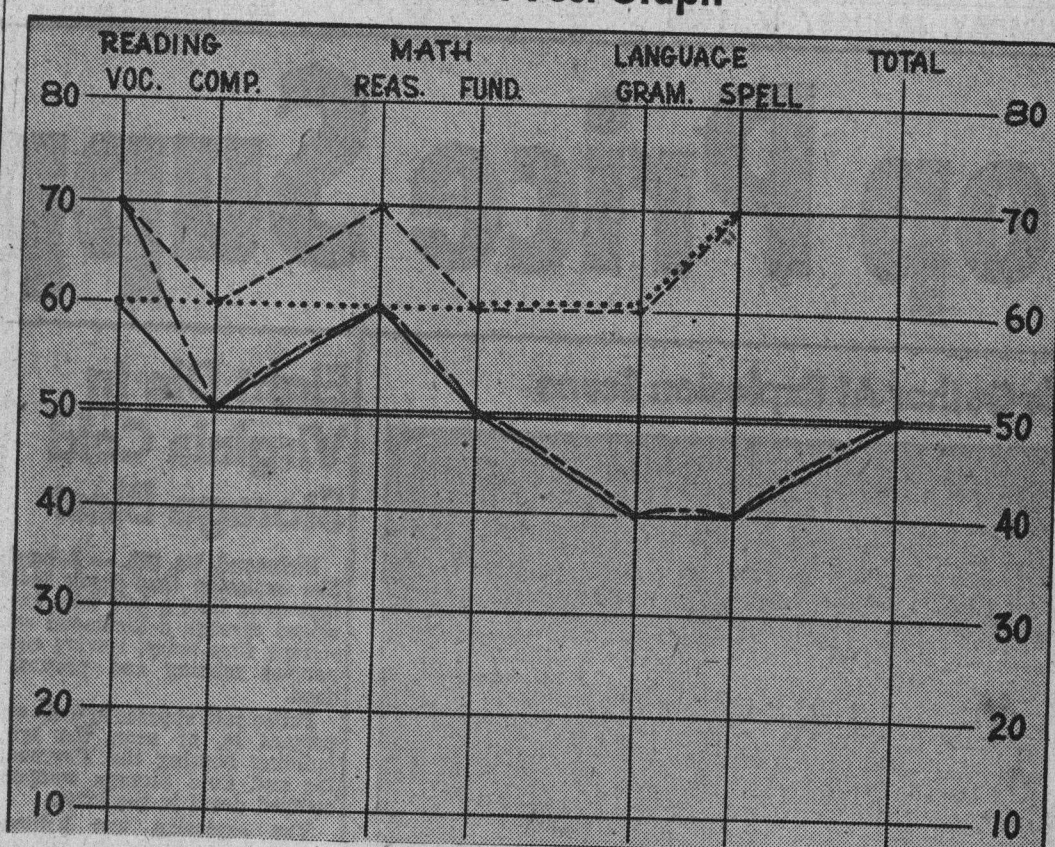
Sixth grade: above grade average in vocabulary and arithmetic reasoning; slightly below grade average in arithmetic fundamentals.

Fifth grade: above average in vocabulary and slightly above average in the rest of the categories.

Fourth grade: above average in both reading categories and in arithmetic reasoning; and average in the rest of the categories.

By being above or below average on these categories, Bell explained does not usually mean a whole grade below or above. It indicates months in a school year. Some grades may be from two to six months behind or ahead. Students in each class, for example, study the same subjects, but function at different levels. Bell also presented the extreme ranges of the scores. For example we have children in the eighth grade who scored up above the 11th grade and down to the third grade level in vocabulary; to above the 12th grade and down to the fourth grade in arithmetic fundamentals.

Student Test Graph



The thick horizontal line at "50" represents the national achievement average. The steady black graph line is the average eighth grade score in achievement. The broken line clinging close to it represents achievement test results for the

class. The dotted line at "60" is the class's mental maturity level. The dotted line on top is the eighth grade's result in the maturity test. Abbreviated words are vocabulary, composition, reasoning, fundamentals, grammar and spelling.

How is all this put to use? With the results broken into classes at the various grade levels, Bell said he would hold conferences with the teachers to discuss various methods of bolstering the below average areas.

"There is no way to determine the effect a certain teacher has on the test results," said Bell. "The all-over teaching quality does show, however."

Also to be considered are certain new philosophies in education.

For example, in arithmetic and reading now, some schools are experimenting with spending more time with fundamentals.

Testing results may show below average scores in certain areas in the lower grades then shoot ahead in the seventh and eighth grades.

The mental maturity tests indicate a level which, ideally, should be matched by achievement.

"This goal is seldom realized as a class however," Bell said. "Children have different likes and dislikes and thus put more effort into some subjects than others."

The capacity level of students of school districts are seldom the same. Thus, such a testing study can rate itself in efficiency, but comparison with another district does not necessarily present a true picture.

Richard Struck, director of special education and guidance in the county schools office, who is championing the program throughout the county, explained: "If a district has an average IQ of 90 and the kids are working to near capacity then a good program exists."

"If, on the other hand, students of a district have an average IQ of 100 and the kids are, learning below their capacity, that district is not up to par."

Bell said when the individual student graphs are readied, they will be of great help for conferences with parents.

He said it would be of great help to obtain a state norm and a county norm so that the district would have an idea where it stands in these areas.

Trustee Dr. Eugene Johnson pointed out the possibility of developing a gifted child program with the aid of this testing program. He said:

"Just because a student has a high IQ, it does not mean a good student. Individual drive means much more than IQ, and these tests will indicate what students are making an effort to match their academic achievements with their mental maturity."

Bell said that now with the large class sizes, the teachers spend so much time with the people who are behind, they

have little time left for those at the top of the class. "This also tends to lower the grade level average," he said.

In the overall picture, Bell said that below average scores indicated a period of two to three months, and added: "It is significant to notice that the above average figures indicate from three to four months ahead of the national norm."

How will the school officials go about correcting the below average areas?

"Well," said Bell, "first we must find out if the tests are doing what they are supposed to be doing. For example, this national tests include percentages in certain grade levels. If California does not happen to teach percentages at that grade level, the results in this area are worthless. "But where we do find a cause, we check our curriculum, the time spent on certain subject matter, and instructional method and make the correction."

The tests will also help the teachers divide a class into groups, know where individualized instruction is needed, and determine effectiveness of their own teaching.

The board went on record commending Walters and Bell for their work.

Slip Down Leads To Man's Arrest

Louisville, Ky. (AP)—It wasn't a slipup which led to Francis S. Beck's downfall — it was a slip down.

Police arrived at a store to investigate a break-in.

Beck, 35, clung out of sight under a car for several minutes. But his hands finally slipped on greasy parts. Officers heard him fall and nabbed him.

He was charged with storehouse breaking.

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