Creativity, color, and joy

The Pennsylvania Department of Education prescribes an inflexible sequence of annual written tests students must take on the way to earning a high school diploma. Test scores are then used to judge individuals and whole school districts.

An alternative — and perhaps more meaningful — way of measuring achievement is watching district-wide performances like *The Little Mermaid*, this year’s Pottstown School District musical, which just ended a two-weekend run at Pottstown High School.

If so, Pottstown’s educational system is flourishing.

The performance showcased a cornucopia of colorful costumes, sets, lights, and special effects; a wonderful little orchestra; and a throng of exuberant performers from fourth graders to adults. It attracted 2,675 enthusiastic patrons over five performances.

The kids who performed will remember the experience forever. It gave them confidence, a sense of self-worth and accomplishment, and a chance to bask in the limelight.

There are some tasks in life that we perform alone, and written tests help measure our aptitude for many of those.

But many occupations — indeed, many life endeavors — require working cooperatively with others, taking and giving direction.

Putting together a musical production involving 131 students and 56 adults is far more difficult, in many aspects, than running a business. It requires much more than talent.

Everyone involved is a volunteer. People have to be coaxed, cajoled, and inspired.

Producer Robert Decker, head of the high school math department, estimated students spent more than 10,000 hours “rehearsing, painting, sawing, nailing, singing and dancing.”

Then there were the adults, assembling students from all of the district’s six schools. The show employed a choreographer, set designer, musicians, vocal coach, lighting specialist, and inventive scavengers to come up with 1,001 items, some exotic, needed in the production.

Gail Cooper, retired middle school principal, and former high school guidance counselor Michele Boyd spent weeks making most of the 200 costumes, some quite intricate.

Parent and former art teacher Candie Haas-Simmons designed the sets.

Lincoln Elementary School 4-K teacher and pianist Chris Sperat directed. Sperat, Decker, and their adult helpers have now finished performances four years in a row and are already planning their fifth for next year.

That’s dedication! These people are the backbone of our district and a striking measure of its quality.