



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published November 12, 2007

WHAT'S NEXT

- The Lansing Board of Education will consider the proposal to contract Evans Newton Inc., of Scottsdale, Ariz., to audit the district's high school curriculum and align it with the Michigan Merit Exam at 7 p.m. Thursday in the board room of the Administration Building, 519 W. Kalamazoo St.

Schools chief: Audit would help district raise scores

Lansing's Wallace offers plan to align curriculum with exam

Derek Wallbank
Lansing State Journal

Faced with three high schools that have failed to meet state standards on the Michigan Merit Exam, Lansing school administrators want to spend more than \$1.25 million for an audit of curriculum and teaching methods.

The plan includes outside consultants who will align the district's English and math curricula for ninth through 11th grades to be compatible with the state exam.

It also includes biweekly testing for most high school students in English and math classes to closely track their progress.

New Superintendent T.C. Wallace Jr. wants each high school to meet standards for adequate yearly progress, or AYP, by 2010.

"This is an intervention that we're recommending to the board to move our high schools into compliance for AYP," Wallace said.

Schools that repeatedly fail to make adequate yearly progress can face state or federal sanctions.

Board approval needed

The contract, which goes before the Board of Education for approval Thursday, would award \$964,911 to Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Evans Newton, Inc. to begin the work.

Another \$300,000 would be needed in 2008 for follow-up costs.

The money would come from federal funds the district receives.

In a memo given to the school board finance committee last week, Chief Academic Officer Julie Lemond outlined the high schools' problems.

"The extraordinarily low scores of the Lansing School District students on the (Michigan Merit Exam) indicate that the curriculum and materials used in our classrooms is not aligned to the state framework," Lemond wrote. "It is essential that we adopt strategies which address this problem."

Under the proposed contract, Evans Newton would send an undetermined number of curriculum coaches to Lansing. Once here, the consultants would audit the high schools' math and English curricula, textbooks and classroom instruction, aligning it with core concepts required on the Michigan Merit Exam.

The exam is given annually to 11th-grade students. Scores are used to determine adequate yearly progress, or AYP.

Ninth-, 10th- and 11th-grade students would be tested every other week to see whether they're learning the material and where they are struggling. If they're not up to par in English, for example, the consultants will look to see whether the problem is that they don't read well, that they struggle with writing or whether they have some other issue.

The consultants also will evaluate and coach teachers to ensure that classroom instruction lines up with the exam.

Standards for success

Wallace said the standards for success are simple: Eastern, Everett and Sexton high schools make AYP by spring 2010.

Lemond said Wednesday the goal was to increase the number of students exceeding state standards at the highest level by 25 percent, while increasing the number of students meeting or partially exceeding standards by 20 percent. Even a 10 percent improvement would allow the district to meet state standards.

Evans Newton has been credited with helping turn around schools in other struggling districts, such as Tulsa, Okla., and Pomona, Calif. A full performance report on the company will be presented at the Board of Education meeting Thursday.

But it was Evans Newton's connection to Michigan that caught the district's eye.

"What we have to know is that what they offer is connected with what the Department of Education requires," Wallace explained.

And connected they are.

The firm advised the Michigan Department of Education on how to test Algebra I, Algebra II and Geometry as part of the Michigan Merit Exam.

Other schools' progress

Lansing is hoping to emulate results from other school districts that have employed a similar strategy.

Tulsa, Okla., schools hired Evans Newton in the 2004-05 school year to turn around 35 failing schools. In August 2006, 17 schools came off the state's failing list, while one was added.

Officials in Pomona, Calif., said their schools have progressed on improving student achievement by using the same services Lansing is considering.

"We have seen that we have increases, but not as high as we would (eventually) like to see," said David Savaglio, Pomona's director of research and assessment.

"They do provide us a level of customer service that is excellent," he added. "We feel really good about our assessment systems we've put in place."

Lansing Schools Education Association Vice President Patti Seidl said the district's math steering committee, comprised of math teachers, approved the idea.

"The union is supportive because the teachers are supportive," Seidl said.

Board Finance Committee Chair Jack Davis said after Wednesday's meeting that he, too, supports the idea.

He used his time at finance committee to ask many questions about the mechanics of the plan and Evans Newton's track record.

"It certainly sounds like something we need to do," Davis said. "We certainly need to do something."

Contact Derek Wallbank at 267-1301 or dwallbank@lsj.com.

Copyright 2007 Lansing State Journal Use of this site signifies your agreement to the
Terms of Service (updated August 2006)