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Irondale High School to get visit from U.S. education secretary

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Next year, students at Irondale High School will have more chances at earning free credit toward a two-year college degree as part of a program that has caught the eye of President Barack Obama's education chief.

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan will visit Irondale at 1 p.m. Friday to participate in a town hall meeting with Gov. Mark Dayton and Minnesota Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius to discuss how to improve pathways from school into careers.

The high school in the Mounds View school district will be the first in the state to offer a comprehensive early-college program that will broaden the offering of dual-credit courses at the high school level to younger students in the middle of their academic class.

Typically, college-credit courses are most available to the highest-achieving students.

Obama has set a goal for the U.S. to lead the world again in the proportion of students earning college degrees. Yet the cost of college continues to rise, and students and educators are looking for ways to make higher education more accessible.

Many see dual-credit high school courses as one way to offset the growing expense. It is also a way to give students a taste of college at a young age.

"The cost of college is on so many people's minds," said Joe Nathan, director of the Center for School Change at Macalester College. "The traditional high school, while it is working well for some young people, it is not working well for others."

Nathan's

education advocacy group released a report earlier this month surveying Minnesota's dual credit. It recommended increasing the opportunity for students to take college classes in high school even if they are not top performers.

"Some students who are most successful at college or universities were young people who did not do well in high school," Nathan said.

Irondale has been working toward transforming the class offerings from the traditional 9-12 grade high school to include enough college offerings that students could soon earn an associates degree, said Dan Hoverman, superintendent of Mounds View public schools.

"We set out to do this based on the changing needs of students and their families," Hoverman said.

The move requires improving learning outcomes and realigning courses not just at the high school, but also across the district.

"You don't just suddenly have kids ready to take these types of rigorous courses and be successful," he said.

Irondale staff members are "thrilled" to host Duncan and state education officials to discuss their program and how to improve college and career readiness, Hoverman said.

As many as 300 are expected for the event Friday in the gym of Irondale High School at 2425 Long Lake Road in New Brighton.



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