



SHOREVIEW PRESS > NEWS

Gift: Free ACT for all juniors

Print Page

Board also reviews progress in Legislature

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SHOREVIEW — It's official: Mounds View Schools administered the ACT college prep test to all district juniors April 27.

The testing cost of about \$43,000 was taken care of by a grant from the Mounds View Schools Education Foundation. While the district normally sees the test taken by about 75 percent of its juniors, this year it expected 100 percent participation. The test was taken at the two high schools during schools hours and administered by regular school staff.

"I think there will be some benefits we'll never, ever be able to measure," said board member Lisa Sjobeck, who noted that the onsite location may have reduced test anxiety. "It will open doors for a lot of students, because maybe it will improve their scores by one or two points. That can make a difference in their choices afterward."

Superintendent Dan Hoverman said school staff spent several weeks preparing to meet requirements for official ACT testing sites. In the past, testing has been done on weekends at other metro locations. Mounds View is among the first districts in the state to offer such free testing.

Irondale High School Principal Scott Gengler said the district prepped students by offering practice tests; some 400 students participated in them online while more than 100 attended weekend practice sessions.

On April 27, district ninth and 10th graders also worked on practice tests while seniors worked on post-secondary plans.

Board member Bob Helgeson said the district is prepared for the possibility that blanket testing may knock down the high schools' average test scores, which are consistently above state and national averages. Last year's average at MVHS was 26 while Irondale's was 23.9; Minnesota logged a 22.0 and the U.S. overall logged a 21.

"It's sort-of a gutsy move ... it might knock (the average) down a notch or two," he said. "We (need to) do our best to communicate the added value to the community."

In other news at the April 27 School Board meeting lobbyist Lori Grivna, a director of public affairs and government relations with Stillwater-based Amundson Strategies (and a former School Board member) reported on the Legislature's progress on education issues. Among her points: • The House, the Senate and the governor must agree on a spending target for their respective omnibus bills. At press time the governor's bill was at \$37.3 billion, the Senate bill was at \$34.5 billion and the House bill was at \$34.3 billion, according to Grivna. She said the Education Conference Committee met April 28 to compare Senate and House bills looking for common language with which to start.

- The House and Senate are looking at modernizing the K-12 funding system, a change which is one of Mounds View's stated legislative priorities. Grivna pointed to discussion about regional indexing that would recognize a cost differential in different areas of the state.

- Grivna heard an April 27 presentation by former Florida Governor Jeb Bush who reflected on successful steps Florida has taken to address its achievement gap and reform. She said Florida focuses heavily on K-3 literacy, online learning, individual learning plans, different styles of learning for students, AP coursework and preparation for college admission testing. It also grades schools on an A-through-F scale. "That's something introduced in both the House and Senate, and I would not be surprised if something came forward on the final omnibus bill," she said.
- A House bill calls for maintaining but restructuring the Q Comp (Quality Compensation for Teacher) program to which Mounds View belongs. Through Q Comp, 50 districts statewide receive up to \$260 per student per year as part of a program in which districts and teacher representatives work out details regarding teacher compensation, development and advancement. "If it moves forward, all Q-Comp schools would have to reapply," Grivna said. "I'm not certain what that would look like and how that would impact what you might be working on with your staff."
- Discussed reductions in education have related primarily to the state education budget of \$14.1 billion, she said. "How that redistributes and shakes out in the school districts will be very different," she noted. "For Mounds View, integration funding could be impacted ... it's treated differently in House and Senate (proposals) but in either case, integration funding as you know it would go away". A Senate proposal calls for literacy grants based on proficiency and growth, she said, and a House proposal looks at "innovation grants" instead of designated integration funding to reduce the achievement gap. Hoverman noted that several districts including Mounds View have already made future plans based on expectations of integration funding; one calls for a magnet program next year at Edgewood Middle School. Griva acknowledged that the uncertainty "really does put districts in a bind."
- A discussed freeze in special education spending would "have a huge implication" for Mounds View, she said, because of its relatively high special ed population. Hoverman reiterated his frustration at that scenario. "I think we do a really good job serving kids in special ed ... (but) talk about unfunded mandates," he said. "To mandate us to do things that are beyond, in some cases, what are necessary ... then turn around and cap our funding ... that's a pretty hard pill to swallow."
- Relief from some state education mandates may be pending. "The Legislature is .. saying that if we can't look at increasing the pre-pupil funding formula, at least do something to help the districts and give them more flexibility in staffing to meet the individual needs of the schools," she said. "I expect that will be in the final bill."
- A Senate proposal calls for a per-pupil funding increase of \$50 each year of the biennium. A House proposal calls for a \$31 increase in 2011 and another increase in 2014, she said.
- Several pending finance bills discuss changes in tenure and teacher performance and evaluation and "best practices and mentoring in schools."
- Some are predicting that a special session to iron out legislative details will extend into July, but Grivna is optimistic the regular deadline will be met in May. "There's lots of talk about cooperation and getting it done," she said.

Want to be on board?

The terms of four current School Board members are expiring in January 2012 and elections will be held Nov. 8, 2011. The board is hosting informational gatherings through which residents contemplating board service can learn firsthand what it's like. Dates are as follows:

- 7 a.m. Wednesday, May 4 at the Shoreview Community Center, 4580 Victoria St. N.
- 6:30 p.m. Thursday, May 5 at the Mounds View Community Center, 5394 Edgewood Drive in Mounds View

To learn more or download a booklet on board service, visit www.moundsvIEWSchools.org/news.asp?

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