

All OHS students may have to take ACTs

Written by MARK JAEGER

Wednesday, 19 September 2012 16:12

Superintendent's plan follows state initiative to track academic progress

Students at Ozaukee High School could someday be required to take ACT college placement tests before graduation.

Supt. Blake Peuse told the Northern Ozaukee School Board last week he is considering implementing a policy that would make completion of the ACTs a graduation requirement, possibly as early as the 2013-14 school year.

Traditionally, the ACTs — which derive their name from American College Testing, the company which developed the standardized test — have been taken only by college-bound high school students.

“It may be counter to what you would think, but research has shown that a district’s composite ACT scores increase the more students take it,” Peuse said.

“I think the ACTs are an extremely accurate and cost-effective way of measuring how prepared our students are by using a national standard.”

Although students currently pay a fee to take the test, the district would have to pick up the expense if it became a graduation requirement. Peuse estimated that cost would be about \$3,100.

“With the push to get every student college and career ready, we have been driving our students pretty hard. Getting ready for this test is another way to prepare them for life after high school,” Peuse said.

“This is not something we could do this year, but certainly in two years.”

The issue might become a concern for school districts across Wisconsin, with Department of Public Instruction Supt. Tony Evers announcing an initiative last week that would have all juniors take the four-test ACT suite. Evers has proposed the move as part of the DPI’s 2013-15 budget.

Mandatory use of the standardized test has gained support from states around the country.

“States that have adopted the ACT have found ‘diamonds in the rough,’ students who had the skills to go on to college or a high-skills trade, but were not considering that as an option,” Evers said in the news release announcing the initiative.

Northern Ozaukee officials also reviewed the composite ACT scores of students at last week’s meeting, noting a general trend of improvement in recent years.

Last spring, 54 Ozaukee High students took the ACT tests, getting a composite score of 22.9. That marks a nominal improvement over the 2011 district score of 22.7, and it represented a

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significant edge over last year's statewide composite score of 22.1.

"We are showing improvement, but we are still not where we want to be," Peuse said.

He predicted even more significant score improvement in the next year or two, when the district implements the Common Core curriculum in English and mathematics.

"Once the Common Core fully takes effect, we will see improved scores," Peuse said.

In last year's senior class, 54 of 65 students took the ACT tests. Just four years ago, only 31 Ozaukee High students took the test.