



Project Achieve

Program to assist learning in R.I. schools

By Robin J. Youngblood
Staff writer

A new federal program will help Rock Island teachers and parents prepare students to meet state academic achievement standards.

The Rock Island-Milan School District will participate in the federal pilot program, Follow the Leader, intended to help students meet Illinois' learning requirements.

Project Achieve is a computer program that helps teachers evaluate their students' weaknesses and strengths and then develop lessons to target areas where they need help, said Project Achieve's CEO and president, Stacey M. Boyd. Teachers also can track how students did on achievement tests over several years to diagnose their needs and chart their progress.

For example, the program allows a teacher to look at a student's past test performances question by question. The teacher might notice the student always misses fraction questions. The teacher can then arrange for the student to get extra help in mastering fractions.

Achieve also includes sample lesson plans teachers can use to help students meet goals and offers students practice exams to track improvement, according to Ms. Boyd.

Parents also can access their student's performance online.

A \$3.5 million federal grant will fund the pilot program nationwide. More than 1,000 schools are using the program without federal assistance.

In Illinois, the state board of education chose 10 Illinois schools based on the school's "willingness and wiredness." Six of the schools are in the Rock Island district, including Thurgood Marshall Learning Center, Washington Middle, Edison Junior, Audubon, Lincoln and Longfellow elementaries.

They were the only district schools to express interest in participating in the program, said assistant superintendent of curriculum Jay Marino. He gave the school board a presentation about Project Achieve at the Oct. 22 board meeting.

The other four schools in Illinois to participate are in the Leepertown and Virginia school districts. The state board of education isn't releasing the names of the schools until Monday.

"Follow the Leader got started from the Education Leaders Council in Washington, D.C.," Ms. Boyd said, "to help states implement on the ground the new federal legislation (No Child Left Behind)."

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), signed January, 2001, requires every U.S. child to meet state academic achievement levels by 2014.

Four schools in the Rock Island-Milan district are on the state academic watch list for not meeting standards.

Ms. Boyd said those schools were part of the reason Rock Island was chosen for the program. The schools' leaders also were "willing and committed" to participate in the

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the program.

"We feel this is one method, one strategy that we can use to help us increase student achievement," said Mr. Marino. "We're trying to work smarter ... by using the best resources possible."

The district has taken many steps to improve student achievement in the past year. The district has increased staff development, tutored at-risk students, mentored students, used problem-solving techniques in the Koalaty Kid program and others.

Schools also need Internet and computer access to run Project Achieve. Mr. Marino said Rock Island will receive 30 computers from the state board of education for use only by students for Project Achieve.

Teachers will learn how to use the program through online tutorials. A Project Achieve trainer will visit the schools every other week to help teachers understand how the program works, Ms. Boyd said.

"The idea behind Project Achieve was to get the teachers to know what has been taught

and what has been learned," Ms. Boyd said.

Principals at each school will form a leadership team of the principal and two or three other teachers or staff to oversee the program.

"This (Project Achieve) should definitely help us when teaching directly to the standards," Mr. Marino said. "We're happy to be participating, and

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the ISBE is certainly happy for us to be on board."

Project Achieve's Web site is www.projectachieve.com.

The district will evaluate Project Achieve in a few months to determine if it is producing desired results, Mr. Marino said. He will present the findings during a school board meeting.