

BOARD OKS PLAN FOR IMPROVING SCHOOLS

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Columbus school-board members agreed to changes in the district's continuous-improvement plan last night to offer a closer look at how well students do.

Test results and attendance records will come under greater and more consistent scrutiny, district analyst John Farley said in presenting the revisions.

The district must provide the state Department of Education with a plan for improvement because it met just five of 27 state academic and performance standards on this year's report card and has been in academic emergency for three years.

Revisions to the plan, which first was adopted in 1999, were based on a May assessment of district operations by the Department of Education, which said the plan included no clear method for gauging improvement, Farley said.

The state report also said goals for improving instruction were not properly linked to curriculum requirements and that there is not consistent monitoring of teaching practices and results.

The new plan solves those problems, said Karen Schwarzwald, board vice president.

"We're linking all these steps to the collection of data," she said.

For example, as part of the district's objective of maintaining or improving all standards, 75 percent of eighth-graders need to pass the writing section of the proficiency test by June and 71 percent must pass the citizenship section, the plan states.

That would be accomplished by making sure that study materials are based on information the tests cover, that students who fall behind get extra help and that teachers get additional training, according to the plan.

In other business, the board heard a report from the Accelerating Academic Achievement team about efforts to

improve the district's 22 lowest-performing schools.

This year, each of the 18 elementary and four middle schools received extra administrators and more teachers to reduce the student- to-teacher ratio to 18-to-1.

Teachers also get additional training, and parents get student-progress reports every three weeks. It's not yet clear whether the changes have been effective, the team said.

At its Dec. 18 meeting, the board will discuss proposed changes to the district's budget policy.

Beginning in 2003, the curriculum, not staffing, will drive how the budget is set. In the past, the district decided how many teachers and staff were needed, then began the budget process.

Under the new plan proposed by board member David Dobos, resource allocation will be linked first to the continuous-improvement plan and the short-term work plan unveiled last month by Superintendent Gene Harris for moving the district quickly out of academic emergency.

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