

West Point schools get federal grant

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WEST POINT - West Point School District Federal Programs Director Suzanne Brasfield told the district's board of trustees Monday that city schools will receive additional funding for English language learning tutor training, professional development and drug awareness programs with a federal grant awarded to the district for the fourth consecutive year.

"Every year we can have dreams for our schools," she said Tuesday. "Now we can dream a little bit bigger about the things we need to provide the best school experience for the children."

The Title VI school program provides discretionary funds to meet the needs of rural, low-income schools. Grants are awarded to the state by the federal government, which in turn awards sub-grants to eligible school districts.

Brasfield said the \$100,000 grant has previously been used to train Leslie Scott, a counselor at West Side Elementary School, in the "Too Good for Drugs" program.

She said the district will train an additional counselor with this year's grant for South Side School in the school-based prevention program.

The program, developed by the non-profit Mendez Foundation in Tampa, Fla., is designed to reduce risk factors and enhance protective factors related to alcohol, tobacco and other drug use among students.

The grant may also fund teacher recruitment and retention, teacher professional development and educational technology.

School improvement plan

Fifth Street Junior High School Principal Alvin Taylor presented his improvement plan for the seventh and eighth grade school.

West Point School District Superintendent Steve Montgomery has asked all district principals to present a school progress plan to the board this school year.

Taylor's five-phase plan includes providing children with a safe learning environment, increasing teacher and student accountability, incentive programs, effective after-school tutoring, and increasing effectiveness of instructional strategy.

To increase teacher and student accountability, Taylor said the school has already begun to evaluate teacher performance through in-class observations.

Montgomery said the program will ensure teachers are educating at a proficient level, which he defined as the ability to provide instruction that will enable a child to be proficient on the Mississippi Curriculum Test.

TeacherEase program

The district is also utilizing a computer program called "TeacherEase" that enables parents to check their child's academic progress via the Internet.

"They just sign in online and it lets parents know how their children are doing at all times," Montgomery said Tuesday

The incentive program will reward students based on academic grade performance, behavior and scores on the MCT.

Montgomery said Taylor held a cookout last week for students who scored at least 50 points higher on the MCT this year than the previous year.

Taylor told trustees the "Extended Day" after-school tutoring program was scaled back for the first nine weeks of the school year because he thought students in previous years would lose their academic edge by "burning out" by the end of the school year.

"By holding it back until the second nine-week term, the students should be fresh at the end of the year before the MCT," Montgomery said.

Taylor also told the board that the school will administer MCT practice tests during the school year to pinpoint weaknesses that can be addressed before the actual MCT.

"It will give the school a look at where students need help and will increase the effectiveness of instruction," Montgomery said.