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Today's News

Report sets goal for district schools

Officials hope studying model schools in state will lead to improvements in Oswego.

Wednesday, January 23, 2002

By Fred A. Mohr

No more excuses.

That was the message Tuesday as the Oswego City School Board and several dozen administrators and faculty heard a report comparing Oswego test results with those of a handful of efficiently performing schools.

"This study removes the ability to blame others - kids, parents, the economy - for poor performance," Superintendent Ken Eastwood said. "We see schools (in this study) that have more poverty, fewer English-speaking students, but they're doing better on math and (English Language Arts) tests."

He said the idea was to visit these model, or exemplar, schools and look for practices and programs that could be duplicated in Oswego.

"Right now, we're in the middle of the pack," Eastwood said. "I'd like to see us, in five years, move into that list of exemplar schools."

The study was prepared by Prism Decision Systems, a Binghamton consulting firm. The firm does data analyses for private industry and has begun applying the same standards to education, founder Sean Brady said. He said his company began doing analyses for schools last year. Prism has about two dozen school district clients, he said.

"Private industry has been doing best-practices studies for decades," Brady said. "We think there is tremendous potential for this in education, as well."

The study looked at a handful of limiting factors on 4,000 elementary, middle and high schools around the state, including several measures of wealth and poverty, and English skills, then compared them to how well the schools did on standardized tests. A complex formula produced a handful of model schools for each building in the district and compared them.

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Brady used Charles E. Riley Elementary as an example, comparing it with model schools in Portville, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Rochester and Utica. The elementary study was based on 2,094 schools. Of those, 71 were judged models.

Although P.S. 48 Mapleton of Brooklyn had much higher levels of poverty and fewer pupils for whom English was a first language, it had overall higher scores on both English Language Arts and math tests. These included 26 percent more pupils at Level 3 math and 29 percent more at Level 4, the mastery level, on its ELA tests than Riley.

Brady said Oswego schools generally are exceeding the standards set by the state.

"The point (of the study) is to identify these exemplar schools and then learn ways to join them," he said.

Eastwood said members of the district's school improvement teams will visit the model schools and recommend better instruction practices. "We're in a period of declining revenues," he said. "We have to become more efficient if our kids are going to be able to leave here and compete."

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