

THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Foundation gives \$50,000 to Ann Arbor schools

Grant will fund new software initiative

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The Ann Arbor Educational Foundation has launched an initiative aimed at helping the Ann Arbor Public Schools' finances.

The foundation, which is separate from the school district, is kicking off its Initiatives For Excellence campaign by providing a \$50,000 grant to the district.

The funds will cover training for 15 teachers in the district to learn MyAccess, a software program used to help in literacy efforts. The grant also will help the district work with community nonprofits that offer tutoring to students on how the software works and how to help students use it.

"I think it's a great start," said Wendy Correll, the foundation's executive director. "We're trying to convert former taxpayers to philanthropists."

Before the passage of Proposal A in 1994, local school districts could ask voters for money to cover operating costs, including launching new programs. But Proposal A shifted funding from local property taxes to the state and eliminated local districts' ability to go directly to the voters. That's becoming more of an issue as the state's economy worsens, Correll said. "The economic situation is having ramifications in Ann Arbor," she said.

District officials have already been forced to make millions of dollars in cuts to programs to balance the budget. That's where the foundation hopes to step in.

"We have renewed the ability of the community to have a voice in the funding," Correll said.

District Superintendent Todd Roberts said he is grateful for the support.

"It will really allow us to fully implement the program in grades five to nine," he said. "That's support we'd otherwise have to provide."

"We're fortunate to have a foundation that has provided support to the district a number of years in a number of ways. Everyone is aware of the tough (environment) for schools in Michigan."

Without the foundation's support, the district wouldn't be able to start some new programs, or would be forced to end others to fund the new ones, Roberts said.

The foundation aims to fund districtwide initiatives, not those at individual buildings, Correll said. Administrators will pitch ideas to the foundation's board, which will make funding decisions. It hopes to award future grants of more than \$100,000.

"(Parents) have very high expectations for the programs in Ann Arbor," Correll said. "We're giving them an opportunity to get involved directly."

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