

## **State Initiatives Force Adjustments to High Schools**

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Reed City High School will be making significant changes in two areas for the upcoming school year due to the new state mandates, the Michigan Merit Curriculum and the Michigan Merit Examination.

These two mandates will change the landscape of high school public education not only across the state but, more importantly, at the local building levels. The challenge for each district is how to make adjustments in its operations to implement these programs for the benefit of student learning and progression.

The first initiative is that of the Michigan Merit Curriculum. The State of Michigan has mandated through legislation a more rigorous and demanding high school curriculum for those attending schools in this state. The requirement is that for any student graduating from a state high school, starting with the class of 2011, they must successfully complete four years of Language Arts; four years of Mathematics (including Algebra II); three years of Science; three years of Social Studies; one year of Physical Education/Health; one year of Fine Arts; one year of online course experience; and two years of a Foreign Language. The Foreign Language requirement will be for the graduating class of 2016.

These graduation requirements might not be too different from what the schools are already mandating, but the local districts are going to have to look at their daily schedules to see if these requirements can logistically fit into the students' four-year plans.

The mandate of implementing this curriculum has caused us to evaluate our daily schedule here at Reed City High School. We needed to investigate the comparison of our current schedule, which is the Block, versus another type of schedule that will afford the students a more flexible course offering opportunity. Through our studies, we have found that a schedule called the "Trimester" gives the students a chance for more options of obtaining the courses that they need due to the fact the students will be able to take five classes per term compared to the four classes on the block. The Trimester schedule is made up of three 12-week terms per year. This will give students five classes per term, hence the 3x5 schedule. Students could potentially have fifteen choices per year depending on the length of the courses in terms of weeks. Most core curriculum classes would be in a 24-week terms while all elective courses would be in 12-week terms. This breakdown offers greater flexibility for students when scheduling for their courses as well as when the courses are offered throughout the year.

Needless to say, this is a major undertaking for us as a staff here at Reed City as the timeline of implementation is fall 2007. We have developed a strategic plan with timeline calendars to address all of the nuances in a timely fashion, so the transition will be as smooth as possible. We have dedicated a large portion of our monthly newsletter to keep students and parents informed of the transformation process.

Is it a challenge? That answer is "yes," but it is not insurmountable. We have quality educators and professionals that will make this adjustment work for our students.

The second initiative is that of the Michigan Merit Examination. I am sure all of you have heard about the MEAP test that all eleventh graders take each spring; well, that assessment has gone through some changes as well. It is now called the MME or better known as the Michigan Merit Examination. This test will take place in the spring of the year and will have components identical to the American College Test (ACT), which is a challenging test, needless to say. There is a committee formed at the high school that will spend countless hours this fall preparing the students, staff and the building for this upcoming new assessment.

The test components will be the ACT plus Writing, Work Keys and Michigan Mathematics, Michigan Science and Social Studies. This is a timed test that lasts a total of eight hours in length and will be administered over a three-day period (March 13-16, 2007). There are strict regulations associated with this test as to when it must take place, what time of day the test must start, who can proctor this test, who can be test supervisors, back-up supervisors, accommodation coordinators, how many can be tested in one site, arrangement of the testing seats, a setting separate from the rest of the student population, just to name a few.

This will be the assessment that issued a financial stipend for those students who passed all its components (*i.e.*, college money), the word at this point is that they are not certain if there will be funding to support the stipend as it has happened in the past.

**That leads me into the toughest part of this assessment mandate.** The test has to be meaningful for the students or they will not approach it in a serious manner. The assessment scoring reflects on the student and the district as a whole, so it is imperative that the MME committee, as well as all of the staff and, most importantly, the parents, sends the message to the test takers that the results of this state assessment have a huge impact on our whole educational system.

Our high school committee will be working this fall to fulfill all the testing site obligations, along with monthly newsletter updates to keep students and parents apprised on this new assessment.

As you can see, these two initiatives alone will cause us to change the way we have been doing business here at Reed City High School. But, please be assured that we will continue to be the quality-driven secondary school that we all expect.

Sometimes an evaluation of how you do business is a necessity regardless of the reason that we have to go through it.