

# Accreditation, SAT big topics for CV schools this year

By Thomas Franz✉



Chippewa Valley Schools is preparing for a big year in 2016. (File photo by Thomas Franz)

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CLINTON TOWNSHIP — As 2016 gets underway, Chippewa Valley Schools is preparing for a host of districtwide changes and reviews.

The first review will occur by way of accreditation from AdvancED, which is an international review organization. Each building in the district is accredited on its own currently, but district Superintendent Ron Roberts said AdvanceEd will be reviewing the district as a whole starting in the last week of February and running through the first week of March.

“They’ll be making school visits, talking to a lot of people and observing a lot of things, and then at the end of that visit, we’ll have a presentation from the team and they’ll tell us what we do well and what we can improve on,” Roberts said. “That’s exciting, and that’s an awful lot of work, preparation and planning. It’s a good process for the district to go through.”

Roberts said the district has been working with AdvancED for 10 years, and ensures the district is continuously improving.

In April, a review of exploratory courses offered for middle school students districtwide will also be reviewed.

Director of Secondary Education Ed Skiba said the district will be looking to update the courses to make them more appropriate with today’s technology and current events.

“We want to tweak our exploratory classes. We want to tweak them to make them a little more relevant to what the kids really need to know,” Skiba said.

A committee of parents, teachers, administrators and students will discuss the new courses, which Skiba said could include Lego robotics, coding and courses related to the 15 issues identified by the United Nations Millennium Report, such as climate change, corruption of politics, renewable energy and treatment of women around the world.

Also in April, high school juniors can begin taking the SAT, the required exam for college applications as opposed to the ACT. Roberts said the district has prepared well for the change in required exams.

“That’s been a really strong initiative in our district this year, and will continue to be. It’s very encompassing because it’s such a big change for us,” Roberts said. “We’re not only in-servicing our staff on what the SAT will look like and what they expect on that test, but we’ve also met with all 11th-grade students. They all have accounts with the Khan Academy online so they can go on and do SAT-like practice tests.”

At the end of the school year, Skiba said, the district will review the work of data teams to gauge the impact of intervention programs on student performance.

“We have to make sure every kid is getting it,” Skiba said.

Also at the middle school level, Skiba said, a standard-based grading system will continue to be implemented. In this manner, students will be graded separately on which standards they met, effort and behavior.

“The letter grade is not as important as if the kid actually met the standard and whether they can do it. That’s a big shift for our middle school teachers,” Skiba said. “It’s almost like pass-fail, either you get it or you don’t.”

Going forward, the topic that may have the farthest-reaching impact into the future of the district may happen first this year.

Roberts said a presentation of the district’s strategic plan will occur before the Board of Education this month. He added that the last strategic plan similar to this year’s all-encompassing version took place in the ’90s, and involved 75 people.

“We always have plans. What’s different from recent years is we really involved a lot of stakeholders and plucked a lot of perception data from parents and the community members,” Roberts said.

In terms of key dates, March 23 will be the Taste Fest event, with more than 25 restaurants participating in the annual fundraiser for the district’s education foundation.

Election Day comes on Nov. 8, and three members of the district’s Board of Education have terms expiring. The seats of board President Frank Bednard, Secretary Beth Pyden and Trustee Jill DeMuyneck Zech are all up for reelection this year.