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St. Paul school board adopts consultants' key ideas

[James Walsh](#), Star Tribune

The St. Paul school board on Tuesday approved a \$629-million budget for the 2007-08 school year that pumps \$12.5 million more than expected from the state into the schools -- mostly in the form of additional money for special education.

But what has St. Paul officials really excited is that the district used outside consultants to better align its money with where it will do the most good. The consultants from Education Resource Strategies, who were hired last June on a \$150,000 contract, looked at school programs, the budget, the district's new strategic plan and recommended how to better use the district's money to accomplish its goals.

Two of the biggest recommendations to come from the consultants' work -- and already making an impact in this budget -- have to do with special education and teacher training.

The first recommendation is to model special education services after St. Paul's successful English Language Learner programs -- specifically to move to a "pull-in" model. That means the district would, whenever possible, keep special education students with a regular classroom teacher who would team with a special education teacher in the classroom to deliver lessons.

This method, used in teaching English Language Learner students, is credited with helping St. Paul narrow the achievement gap between English-speaking students and those learning English.

The second recommendation is to promote better teaching by having coaches and trainers work with teachers in their own classrooms.

Currently, many of the district's training efforts involve taking teachers away from their classrooms to participate in seminars or watch other teachers in other buildings.

The idea behind using Education Resource Services, said Lois Rockney, the St. Paul schools director of business and financial affairs, is to get the biggest academic bang for the buck.

The Minneapolis school board is expected to adopt its 2007-08 budget next week.

St. Paul Superintendent Meria Carstarphen said the consultants' report is another step toward making the best use of limited funding sources.

"We know that many of our students are doing well," Carstarphen said. "But how do we actually raise the bar?"

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