

FIRM WILL PILOT LYNN STUDENTS TO TEST

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By JOHN STRAHINICH

A Boston financial education firm — best known for its work with the likes of Fidelity Investments and Boston University — is offering its new Web-based SAT prep program free to Lynn high school students studying for the college entrance exam.

The novel marketing ploy by Boston Test Prep comes just as students everywhere have begun taking a longer and reportedly more intense version of the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the time-honored, angst-ridden rite of passage for the college-bound.

Boston Test Prep has been negotiating with Lynn city and school officials for six weeks and expects to get the go-ahead next week, according to the firm's general manager, Ben Carcio.

"It's really a test case for us," said Carcio, who helped develop the program. "It's a program we want to take national and offer to other cities."

As many as 90 Lynn students per semester will be enrolled in Boston Test Prep's program over the next two years. It can take from six weeks to four months to complete, depending on the student and the time invested.

"You can't argue with free," said Lynn School Committee member Daniel Cahill, who predicts the

committee will formally accept the firm's offer at its March 30 meeting. "It's filling a void we have. Everything here is MCAS-driven.

"All our extra funding goes to helping our kids get out of high school," Cahill added. "This is something to help them get into college."

Boston Test Prep, formerly known as Acadient Inc., developed an online program for BU that prepares students to become certified financial planners.

The firm also provides educational content for online training programs for such clients as Fidelity and The Vanguard Group.

Carcio said the SAT program came about when several co-workers' high-school-age kids began comparing notes about test-prep programs. That market is dominated by Kaplan Test Prep and Princeton Review.

Boston Test Prep is hoping the new three-part, 3-hour-and-45-minute-long SAT test, which made its debut this month, will open things up for new players.

The firm plans to begin selling its program next month as a \$50-a-month subscription service.

Cahill calls the deal a "win-win" for the firm and for Lynn.

"We're offering our students as test subjects," he said, "literally and figuratively."