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Billboard to help schools

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# Billboard to help schools

## Newport High leases land

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**NEWPORT** - Newport High School's location next to Interstate 471 will help earn Newport Independent Schools \$16,000 annually.

The money will come from renting land to a billboard company that put up a billboard alongside the high school this month.

Newport Independent Schools has spent two years trying to get clearance from the state to erect it.

School officials hope state laws will change to allow the billboard to become electronic and create \$44,000 in annual revenue as well as give the school the ability to advertise school events.

The billboard, which went up last week, now features ads for Newport and its Italianfest on one side and one for Newport schools, with students smiling down, on the other.

The school board wanted the billboard to offset rising costs and keep taxes low, said board chair Robert Usleaman.

Norton Outdoor Advertising approached the school board two years ago with the idea of a billboard on school property along I-471.

"Basically it is a partnership with a local business to help the school," Usleaman said.

Norton Outdoor Advertising originally proposed an electronic billboard, which is not allowed under state laws, school officials said.

School officials say the billboard has the hardware for electronic conversion should the law change.

Norton offered 500 advertising spots a day to the school on a scrolling electronic billboard, said Superintendent Michael Brandt.

"This is an area where there is a high volume of traffic," Brandt said. "We could have advertised fundraisers and events there. It has a major ability someday to bring in more income."

When the state rejected the electronic billboard, the school system struggled to get the permits and zoning from the state for a regular billboard, Brandt said.



THE ENQUIRER/PATRICK REDDY

A billboard along I-471 features Newport students, but soon will be used for ads. The Newport school district will get \$16,000 a year for the land, more if the sign can go electronic.

The state rejected a variance that would have allowed the school to place the billboard farther from the street, making it less conspicuous, Brandt said. The state this year notified the school they could have a static billboard, Brandt said.

Norton owns the billboard and has agreed to a 15-year land lease with the school district for \$16,000 a year. The money will go into the school's general fund, Usleaman said.

Norton, as a show of thanks, put ads for the city and Newport Schools on the billboards this month.

"Those are our kids from each of our schools," school spokesman Bill Shamblin said. "Imagine the thrill they had seeing their picture."

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