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## Delaware schools: Education board OKs changes to rules

### Steps needed for Del. to compete for funds

By *EDWARD L. KENNEY*  
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The state Board of Education on Thursday unanimously passed regulatory changes to educator evaluations and the way failing schools are restructured, moves designed to compete more effectively for federal Race to the Top funding.

"Because of the courage of this administration and the state board, Delaware is now better positioned for the much-needed funding dollars for our education reform," state Secretary of Education Lillian Lowery said of the measure's passage.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced in November that Delaware could receive up to \$75 million to drive education reform if it is selected as a recipient of the funding. Duncan plans to award portions of the \$4 billion competitive grant to states willing to undertake changes in the way schools are run.

Passage of revamped regulations to hold educators accountable for student achievement and to better restructure failing schools was needed to be more competitive in seeking federal dollars, state officials said.

Delaware also received some other good news this week in its efforts to win the money. A national analysis reported by the nonprofit Education Trust rates Delaware among the top states in the country when it comes to closing the achievement gap.

Duncan has said funding will not only go to states that institute bold reforms but to ones that demonstrate a record of progress in narrowing gaps in student achievement.

Paul Herdman, president of the education nonprofit Rodel Foundation, a major benefactor of the Vision 2015 initiative that seeks to make Delaware a world leader in education, was heartened by the findings of the analysis.

"It just shows that the folks on the ground are working very hard with the kids that need the most help and are making headway," Herdman said. "It demonstrates to the rest of the country that we look to be a national leader as we complete the Race to the Top application next week. I think this is really helpful in terms of that part of the application."

The Education Trust found four states were making the most progress -- Delaware, Florida, Massachusetts and Texas -- giving them frontrunner status for earning top scores on the gap-closing sections of their Race to the Top applications. The analysis also found that Vermont, a racially homogenous state, nevertheless generally performs well across the income spectrum.

The analysis looked at data from four areas: simple gap narrowing, progress for all student groups, the size of the gap and how well all groups compare to other schools, districts and states. Delaware scored high in three out of four of those perspectives, missing out only when it comes to showing

progress for all student groups.

In Race to the Top, states will be evaluated on six major factors: high-quality assessments and rigorous international standards; data systems that track student achievement; teacher and principal evaluation systems; improvement of lowest-performing schools, support of charter schools; and progress closing the achievement gap.

Delaware already meets many of those priorities. But Gov. Jack Markell announced last month a plan to make the changes in teacher evaluations and the restructuring of failing schools, both of which required the board of education's approval.

The changes re-define the student-improvement component of educator evaluations to require rigorous and comparable measures of student growth, and they create a rating system so that satisfactory student growth is required for an educator to receive a rating of "effective." Conversely, educators who do not show satisfactory student growth cannot be rated "ineffective."

In addition, the change to regulations add a "highly effective" category for educators who meet at least four out of five components of the rating system and who show more than one-year's growth among their students.

The changes also require that teachers who are not rated "effective" be provided a mentor or instructional coach as part of their improvement plan.

The changes in evaluations will take effect in the 2011-2012 school year, giving the state 18 months to implement the new assessment system and work with stakeholders to develop measures that are rigorous, comparable and fair.

The school-restructuring part of Markell's plan calls for the lowest-performing schools to join a "partnership zone" and receive funding. Districts in the zone will have more spending flexibility and performance incentives to attract and retain effective teachers and principals. The state and the district will negotiate a plan to turn the school around.

## Additional Facts

### CHARTER SCHOOLS

The state's Board of Education Thursday voted to renew for another five years the charters of Family Foundations Academy in New Castle, the Pencader Business & Finance Charter High in New Castle and East Side Charter in Wilmington. However, noting East Side students have been under-performing on the state test for many years since it was founded in 1997, the board voted to add conditions to its charter renewal. If standards are not met by spring 2011, the school could be placed on formal review.

Seven new charter schools that applied to the board to open in August 2011 were given the go-ahead to continue with the application process. Those schools are Rosaile Obara City Charter in Wilmington, Gateway Lab School in Newark, Odyssey Charter in New Castle County, Delaware Institute of Technology in New Castle County, Delaware Academy of Science and Engineering in New Castle County, First State Math and Science Academy in New Castle County and First State Montessori Academy in New Castle County.

The American International Charter High School in southern New Castle County and Veritas Classical Education Academy in Wilmington will have to re-apply.

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