

State files Race to the Top application

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By Doug Denison, Staff Writer
Dover Post
Tue Jan 19, 2010, 02:07 PM EST

Dover, Del. -

Gov. Jack Markell congratulated the state's education community today upon submission of Delaware's application for the federal Race to the Top program, which could bring millions of dollars to the state's school districts.

Markell also said that though guidelines from the federal Department of Education say states the size of Delaware can expect to receive anywhere from \$20 to \$75 million in Race to the Top grants, the state's application asks for \$107 million.

Estimates from DOE for what states can expect to receive from the \$4 billion pot of money are based on the percentage of school-aged children in each state, but the department has said some jurisdictions could receive more than is estimated and others could receive less.

"Nobody can say for sure who's going to win what, but I think we have a strong story to tell," Markell said. "Experts we consulted determined it would be appropriate to apply for a number beyond the guidelines."

The governor said widespread support for Race to the Top initiatives in Delaware is one check in the state's column.

All of the state's public school districts, charter schools, superintendents and the Delaware State Education Association teachers' union have signed on to the package of sweeping reforms designed to align with Race to the Top award standards.

On Jan. 14 the state Board of Education approved the plan, which mostly came in the form of Department of Education regulations changes.

"We really came together to get the job done," Markell said.

Diane Donahue, DSEA president, said her group fully supports the reforms.

"Many of those things align with our DSEA resolutions," she said. "To us it was pretty much a no-brainer to support the application.

Most notably, the regulations changes tie student achievement to teacher performance ratings and outline comprehensive plans for rescuing schools that consistently fail to meet educational benchmarks.

Race to the Top applications were due to DOE today and the department is expected to make preliminary award decisions by March, at which time worthy states will be called to Washington, D.C., to elaborate on their plans in person.

A second round of funding awards will be made in the fall.

State Secretary of Education Dr. Lillian Lowery said half of the Race to the Top money Delaware receives will go to the state to administer reforms.

The other half will go directly to school districts, she said.

"They will have some flexibility within the confines of the Race to the Top guidelines," she said.

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