



Delaware schools: State ponders use of Race to the Top funding

**By June 28, Del. must submit its
distribution plans to U.S.**

By NICHOLE DOBO • The News Journal • June 20,
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The state's 90-day window for finalizing how half of its \$119 million federal Race to the Top grant will be distributed among schools is about to close.

Districts and charter schools will share half of the state's award -- money that will be distributed based on a funding formula that takes into account schools' student poverty levels -- but how they choose to spend the money must be approved by the state and federal departments of education.

The other half of the state's grant will go toward statewide programs, such as 10 new employees in the state Department of Education who will oversee the state's education reform efforts.

Detailed plans for the local portion of Delaware's Race to the Top plans are being finalized this week and soon will be sent to the U.S. Department of Education for approval. They are due June 28.

If the state does not approve a local spending plan, then that district or charter school's portion of the money will go back into the overall pool to be split among the remaining school districts, said Daniel Cruce, the state deputy secretary of education.

Some school board members -- particularly those who aren't supporters of the Race to the Top agenda -- have complained that this provision forces districts to compete against each other for the money.

Others aren't pleased that test score data released recently to school administrators is not being shared with board members until the public release

in late July.

That test score data will be used to determine which of the lowest-achieving schools will be part of the state's Race to the Top effort to turnaround failing schools.

Christina School Board member John Young, who has been an outspoken critic of Race to the Top, said he's not happy that school boards can't see test score data sooner. If that information is shared with schools, then it should be shown to school boards -- even if the results are still being checked for accuracy, he said.

"My overwhelming emotion is disappointment," Young said. "I kind of understand that it's tradition, but I am disappointed that DOE doesn't see this as the bold year of change that it is."

On Friday, Delaware officials also began interviews for two of the three top state positions created with the Race to the Top grant. These jobs have to do with teacher training and use of test score data. The state still is taking applications for a third management position, which will head up the unit in charge of turning around failing schools.

"These are the big three," Cruce said.

The state will keep advertising for the third position to attract more applicants, Cruce told the state Board of Education last week. This person will monitor

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efforts to turn around 10 failing schools over the next four years. These schools have not been named yet.

In March, the state was named one of two winners of first-round funding in President Barack Obama's Race to the Top education reform program. Initially, the state was awarded up to \$100 million over four years, but that grant was increased to \$119 million this month.

In an effort to keep the community informed about the state's Race to the Top efforts, the state Department of Education also has created a new section on its website that lists job openings, vendor requests and the state's overall plan. The state recently started a process to collect information from education companies about services they have to offer, Cruce said, because they were being bombarded with information from vendors.

"We are trying to be very fair, open and transparent," Cruce said.

The state can't release some other information -- including which schools will be part of the state's effort to turn around schools with failing test scores -- because the state is awaiting a decision from U.S. Department of Education about another grant that ties into the plan, Cruce said.

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