

## School overhaul choices delayed

### U.S. grants don't require early action, state learns

By JONATHAN STARKEY • The News Journal • February 16, 2010

It will be sometime this summer before state officials name the Delaware schools that will be part of a vast new public-private partnership program to turn around failing schools.

Two to four underperforming schools are expected to participate in the 2010-11 school year, using such interventions as replacing at least half a school's staff or transferring students to higher-achieving schools to counter years of failing [performance](#).

State officials originally expected to name the participants last week, a decision they thought had to be immediate to satisfy requirements for federal Title I school improvement grants, said Dan Cruce, the state's deputy education secretary. They since have learned from the U.S. Department of Education that they do not need to name the schools before submitting the [application](#). Delaying the decision will give them the chance to consider 2010 testing data when choosing the schools.

"We want to be able to take into [account](#) what a school has done this year," Cruce said.

Paul Herdman, president of the Rodel Foundation, a nonprofit working to improve Delaware's public schools, supported the state's decision to delay school selection but said officials should work with urgency.

"We obviously want them to be as thoughtful as possible on the selection, and try to balance that with a huge sense of urgency in terms of trying to take action on behalf of these kids," Herdman said. "I want to make sure the state really maximizes this opportunity."

Delaware announced on Feb. 2 that it would

participate, with five other states, in a three-year, \$75 million public-private school turnaround partnership with Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, a Boston-based nonprofit that has developed a program to turn around failing schools.

Mass Insight and the states are committed to each raising \$15 million in private [money](#) for the program, said Justin Cohen, president of Mass Insight's School Turnaround Group.

The remaining \$45 million will be public money, including Title I school improvement grants and any federal Race to the Top grant money that Delaware and the five other states may win through a competitive process.

Delaware applied for \$107 million in Race to the Top grant money last month. Forty states and the District of Columbia applied for funding under the \$4 billion program.

The state will receive about \$11 million in school improvement grant funds this year, up from \$1.6 million.

A federal stimulus plan signed last year added \$3 billion to the school improvement grant pot.

School improvement grants are awarded by formula to states, which then use a competitive process to hand out the money. Cruce said states participating in the turnaround effort will be given first priority.

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Guidelines for grants describe four models for turning around failing schools: shutting down the school and sending students to higher-achieving schools; converting it to a charter school; bringing someone in from the outside to run it; or replacing the principal and at least 50 percent of the staff. Cohen said Mass Insight is best equipped to handle the last two options.

Under the program developed by Mass Insight, states and school districts will select local "lead" partners to manage underperforming schools in so-called partnership zones and determine, with state school officials, which services or changes are needed to reverse the downward slide.

The lead partners would become responsible for student outcomes, and would have the authority to select principals and oversee every program in the school.

Mass Insight's program has yet to be implemented, making Delaware one of the pilot states.

Cruce said that whether or not a Delaware school participating in the turnaround effort will have a lead partner depends on which turnaround model is chosen.

Local district officials will work with school employee unions and the state education department to determine the most appropriate model for each school.

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