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Del. educators, business leaders to meet

Vision 2015 goals will be discussed at conference

By ALISON KEPNER, The News Journal

Posted Friday, November 9, 2007

Educators, policy makers and business leaders will join experts from across the nation in Dover this weekend to discuss alternative teacher compensation and career paths.

The free conference -- sponsored by the Delaware State Education Association, Delaware Public Policy Institute and Vision 2015 -- begins tonight with a keynote speech by Chris Cerf, New York City Department of Education deputy chancellor. Cerf is expected to discuss a bonus pay plan New York officials and teacher union leaders agreed last month to implement for 200 of the city's high-need schools, with expansion to more schools planned for next year. It is one of a host of reform efforts, many also proposed for Delaware by the Vision 2015 reform plan, that New York City has implemented.

"We need to acknowledge there is a need for rethinking our economy," said Paul Herdman, president of the Rodel Foundation of Delaware, the education nonprofit that helped fund Vision 2015 plan development. "Education and the workforce are a big part of that economy."

Saturday's agenda includes a panel discussion on teacher compensation moderated by Allan Odden, co-director of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education at University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Jim Carlson, union director in a Wisconsin district that implemented an alternative compensation system seven years ago, will moderate a discussion on collective bargaining and negotiating change.

Other panelists and speakers include Leo Casey of United Federation of Teachers; Lawrence Mishel, Economic Policy Institute president; Clark Reinke, Plymouth (Wis.) School District superintendent; and Kim Ursetta, Denver Classroom Teachers Association president.

"These are some of the most knowledgeable and thoughtful people in the country around the issues of career paths, compensation and collective bargaining," said John Taylor, Delaware Public Policy Institute executive director.

Incentive-based pay and the creation of teacher career paths are among the changes proposed in Vision 2015, the extensive reform plan released last year by a group of education, business and community leaders aiming to turn the state's school system into a world leader by 2015.

Many of Saturday's panelists come from districts that already have started doing things like compensating teachers based on the success of their students. Taylor hopes Delaware educators and policy makers can learn from their experiences.

"There will always need to be the base salary structure similar to the way it is now in Delaware and throughout the country, a traditional model that in many systems works, but we also realize that in today's world there may be ways to do it better," Howard Weinberg, DSEA executive director, said.

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