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# Vision 2015 may not get state funding

## Department of Education's proposed budget too tight for reform plan

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For the second time in as many years, Vision 2015 could be denied funding for its education reforms from the state's Department of Education.

Money that would help the group achieve its goal of making Delaware a world leader in education by 2015 was not included in the department's 2009 proposed budget, presented Wednesday in Dover.

"I think the intent of this budget is to meet the needs we have and ask for things we think will improve the system, and we know we have a limited amount of money," education department Secretary Valerie Woodruff said after her presentation.

Woodruff said she would like to provide funding for the reform-minded coalition of business, education and community leaders. But much like last year, when Vision 2015 requested \$35.4 million from the state, the group will have to settle for programs that are being funded by the state that line up with its initiatives, including early childhood education, enhanced teacher training and virtual classrooms that tap into online educational resources.

Vision 2015 asked for \$500,000 this year. Marvin "Skip" Schoenhals, steering committee chairman for Vision 2015, did not attend the budget presentation, but issued a statement appealing for the \$500,000 to help provide funding for Vision Network leadership training for a second group of districts and schools. The first group -- eight schools representing four districts and two charter schools -- was put together earlier this year as a pilot program to train educators and others to develop plans to implement Vision 2015 research-based instructional and organizational practices.

Schoenhals, also chairman of WSFS Financial Corp., said he still hopes money for Vision 2015 will be included in next year's budget.

"We have made a request directly to the governor for inclusion of that money into the budget," he said by phone after the budget hearing. "I'm frankly optimistic that, in the end, it will be included."

Paul Herdman, president of the Rodel Foundation, one of the major benefactors of Vision 2015, said the group has been working closely with the education secretary, a fellow Vision 2015 coalition member, and understands the department's fiscal constraints.

"The request that was made last year was based on a lot of research of what was needed to get off the ground," he said. "We made that request last year before we knew what the fiscal climate was going to be."

Herdman said he is hopeful a committee that was formed this year by Gov. Ruth Ann Minner and the General Assembly, called Leadership for Educational Achievement in Delaware could help. Supported by \$3 million from the Delaware Business Roundtable, the LEAD committee is charged with looking at more equitable ways for generating and allocating money and how Delaware can spend education dollars more efficiently.

"We're hoping we can identify some things that can be reallocated in ways that are consistent with Vision 2015 recommendations," he said. "We realize there's not a lot going on with the economy, so we are looking for ways to

spend money more efficiently. We want to be smart about how we spend our current dollars.

"We're hoping, if we can identify savings, we can get additional resources for Vision Network," he said. "We hope to expand the number of [pilot] schools -- if not double them -- in the coming year. The private sector is stepping up to help us get this off the ground while we continue to try to increase our economy."

Schoenhals said the \$500,000 in funding would enable additional schools to participate in leadership training provided by the Delaware Academy for School Leadership at the University of Delaware and specialized school-level training on instructional best practices.

People being trained include board members, superintendents, administrators, principals, parents and teachers, he said, and the total cost to train a second wave of these leaders will be about \$1.2 million. To date, about \$2 million has been provided for the first group through foundations, the Delaware Business Roundtable, the University of Delaware and other sources.

But so far, there has been no funding from the state, and Woodruff said money is tight all around education-wise this year.

"There's really not a lot of new," she said of the proposed budget. "It's really enhancements."

She is seeking about \$1.1 billion in operating funds and about \$218 million in capital funding for next year. The request includes about \$3.4 million for the state's full-day kindergarten initiative, about \$1.2 million for the Delaware Virtual School and an education associate for that school, and \$1.5 million to support growth in programs that benefit students with limited English proficiency.

A contingent of teachers and administrators from the Indian River School District made a short presentation at the budget hearing to ask for more funding for the English Language Learners program.

"We believe in doing whatever it takes to help our students," district superintendent Susan Bunting said following the hearing. "We're just not keeping up. We're getting far more students."

The group did not ask for a specific amount of money.

"We'll take anything," she said. "Any additional funding will help us."

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