



NEWS

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Delaware, Tennessee selected to receive funding in Race to the Top

Schools to get \$100M over four years

By Leah Hoenen

Delaware and Tennessee were selected to receive funding in the first round of the national Race to the Top competition for federal education funding. Delaware is expected to receive \$100 million over four years to help implement educational reform.

The money will help the state set higher standards and improve assessments. Most of the money will be targeted at improving low-performing schools.

Delaware is expected to use data coaches to meet with teachers several times a month to help them develop lesson plans based on assessing what students know.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced the winners Monday, March 29. Delaware requested \$107 million in grant money; state and federal officials now have to meet to iron out details of how to spend the grant money.

Gov. Jack Markell said, "What's really important today is where we go from here; whether we have the will to put our children first and move forward with reforms to improve our schools so that Delaware children can successfully compete for the best jobs in an increasingly competitive global economy." He said it won't be easy, but Delaware has shown impressive effort in trying to reform schools.

Cape school board member Sara Wilkinson has previously said Delaware's small size was to its advantage. She said because the state is small, reforms can be implemented easily and quickly.

Delaware Education Secretary Lillian Lowery said students must meet high standards, and schools must have effective teachers and necessary resources. "While we are very pleased Secretary Duncan has agreed to partner with us in these efforts, we have a lot of hard work and tough decisions ahead of us as we make these reforms a reality," said Lowery.

Finalists had to demonstrate education reform success and outline plans for future reforms, including staff evaluations and data-based student assessment. Winners also had to adopt statewide standards and assessments to prepare students to succeed in college or in careers.

All of Delaware's 19 school districts approved required reforms earlier this year. Cape school board member Andy Lewis said Delaware's win is good for students because districts are working hard to implement the best teaching methods. "I don't expect we'll see a large direct benefit from it in Cape because our schools aren't bad enough," said Lewis. He said the Cape school board chose to support the program because new guidelines would be put in place that would benefit students; if the state has federal money in hand to support changes, districts won't have to pay for them out of local funds. Duncan said Delaware won in part because it passed new policies to support education reform. Forty states plus the District of Columbia applied for the funding.

Education department officials then selected 16 finalists. Those that did not win can apply for the second phase of the program. Delaware Sen. Tom Carper and Sen. Ted Kauffman said they were proud of the state. Carper said Delaware is now leading the nation in education. Kauffman said, "I am especially pleased this grant will concentrate on science, technology, engineering and mathematics education, or STEM education, which will give Delaware students a leg up in the job market of the 21st century." The Obama administration's Race to the Top program offered a total of \$4.35 billion to four states that showed commitment and progress in improving education.


Delaware edged past Tennessee to be named the nation's best education reformers. Delaware spends about \$1 billion on education each year, said Markell's office.

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