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## Delaware gets \$100 million for schools

State one of two awarded federal "Race to the Top" funds

By *NICHOLE DOBO*  
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President Barack Obama's ambitious plan for education reform will begin in Tennessee and Delaware.

The two states edged favored Florida and Louisiana in a contest the administration calls Race to the Top, which is backed by \$4.35 billion carved out of the federal stimulus package.

Obama offered the Race to the Top grants to encourage states to join a national effort to fix failing schools, lift student achievement and reward teachers who excel. Delaware spent five months crafting its winning application, and was rewarded with \$100 million over four years. Tennessee will receive \$500 million.

A team of judges ranked Delaware's application highest among 16 finalists.

On Monday, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan praised the winning states' efforts to turn around struggling schools and create teacher evaluation systems tied to student achievement. "They have demonstrated the courage, capacity and commitment to turn their ideas into practices," Duncan said in a conference call.

Among other criteria, states were evaluated on their support for charter schools, tying standardized test scores to teacher evaluations and requiring district intervention at failing schools.

Both Delaware's and Tennessee's applications included support from teachers unions, something other states lacked.

"This isn't about funding nice pilot programs," Duncan said. "It's about taking student success to entirely new levels and doing it at scale. What was so impressive about Delaware and Tennessee, and why they scored so well, is that their plans touched 100 percent of the students in their states."

In Delaware, money will be spent on four main areas: to strengthen standards and assessment, to support quality educators, to develop data systems to better measure student performance, and to turn around low-performing schools.

"This is not about the money, this is about putting children first," Gov. Jack Markell said.

For Delaware, "this is a huge and humbling opportunity," said Paul Herdman, president of the education nonprofit Rodel Foundation of Delaware, a longtime proponent of statewide school reform.

With this investment will come pressure to deliver. "There's going to be a lot of attention on all of us here," he said.

Among the new initiatives, the money will pay for data coaches to meet with small groups of teachers

several times a month to review student data and help teachers develop lessons to address children's needs. It also will fund teacher leaders at high-need schools, development coaches to work with school principals, fellowships for highly effective educators, and retention bonuses for highly effective teachers in high-needs schools.

Evelyn Edney, principal of Howard High School of Technology in the New Castle County Vocational Technical School District, said the news was the talk of the day at her Wilmington school.

"Anytime you have educational money flowing into the state, that state can do nothing but go up," she said. "It's exciting news. Everybody was on pins and needles, wondering if Delaware was going to be a winner.

"A lot of times, schools need resources. And hopefully, we can use those resources so our children will be well versed in 21st-century skills," she said.

Delaware leaders will work to make sure teachers are given the professional development they need to succeed, said Lillian Lowery, the state secretary of education. Conversations with the teachers union to "develop a plan of action" will be part of the first steps, she said.

Delaware and Tennessee are receiving just part of the stimulus-funded pot. States that did not receive first-phase grants can apply in June for a second round of funding, to be awarded in September. Georgia was ranked third in the first round, followed by Florida. Duncan said as many as 10 to 15 states could win money in the second round.

Delaware was among 16 finalists -- out of 41 applicants -- for the first-round money. Earlier this month, officials from each of the 15 finalist states and the District of Columbia presented their proposals in Washington to review panels that scored the grant applications. Delaware had requested \$107 million.

Applicants were evaluated on six factors: high-quality assessments and rigorous international standards; data systems to track student achievement; educator evaluation systems; improvement of lowest-performing schools; support of charter schools; and progress closing the achievement gap.

To make Delaware more competitive for the grant, Markell proposed -- and the state Board of Education approved -- regulatory changes to how failing schools are restructured and educators are evaluated. The state also recently partnered with the Boston nonprofit Mass Insight Education and Research Institute for a turnaround program for failing schools.

In Delaware's evaluation, judges praised the state for exhibiting "clear detail, integration, vision, and ways to operationalize the plan, building on past work and success in the state. Commitment from the [local education agencies] and the teachers union was highly evident."

They also pointed to previous work in the state, saying Delaware "will be drawing upon valuable lessons learned from their attempts to turn around 24 schools over the last five years.

"Delaware has demonstrated clear progress in each of the four reform areas. For example, there have been three rounds of revisions to its statewide standards since 1995, online performance data available to the public and educators, a rigorous statewide evaluation system for teachers and leaders that includes student improvement, providing clearer expectations for school improvement and restructuring plans for low-achieving schools, regulations that give the state the authority to intervene directly in its lowest-achieving schools, and using state school choice and charter schools to help promote student achievement," the judges said.

## Vision 2015

Education reform has been at the forefront of state policy discussions since 2006, when a coalition of education, business and community leaders created Vision 2015.

The broad-ranging school reform plan aimed to revamp the state's school system into a world leader by 2015 at an estimated cost of more than \$100 million. Recommendations included more time in school, tougher standards, a statewide curriculum, principal autonomy and greater investment in preschool education. While the group has been able to leverage some private support, it failed to garner the needed public dollars for full implementation.

What it did was start the conversation, bringing together major stakeholders such as parents, business leaders, teachers, administrators and elected leaders with a shared vision.

That work brought strength to the state's application, said Jan Leight, a senior executive with the consulting group Focus on Results, which worked with Vision 2015. The work that Vision 2015 has done was important because the U.S. Department of Education was looking for strategies that work, she said.

Leight said results are going to come with improvements in everyday instruction and local leadership - and Delaware's application was strong because it wasn't just about what's new.

"Traditionally, school districts can be fairly initiative-happy, and then they don't stick with it, sometimes," she said. "What matters most is quality teaching and leaders on the school and district level."

Nancy Brickhouse, deputy dean of the University of Delaware's College of Education and Public Policy, believes Delaware's demographics helped its application. With a variety of suburban, urban, rural and immigrant populations, the state could be a good test case, she said.

"We're small, but we're very diverse," she said. "It's a state you can wrap your hands around."

Brickhouse hopes Race to the Top will provide the state's colleges and universities with more funding for math and science teacher training. She said the state's application also proposed data systems to evaluate teacher preparation, which would help UD train future teachers more effectively.

## 'Hard choices'

The plan will force education officials to make the "hard choices" of whether to close or make drastic changes at failing schools, Brickhouse said.

"A lot of this is untested," she said. "It's a grand experiment. It's a bold experiment, and I think some of it will really work."

What made Delaware's application successful was statewide collaboration, said Diane Donohue, president of the Delaware State Education Association, the state's largest school employee union.

DSEA supports using a transformational model, rather than a turnaround model that would replace half the staff at failing schools, Donohue said.

What state officials and the teachers union still need to come to agreement on is how to define student progress as a component of teacher evaluations.

Herdman said changes will be hard in some places, but "the time is right, the resources are there and there's the political will to do something fundamentally different."

Delaware will need collective courage to implement the changes, he said.

"I hope this is a rallying cry to people inside the state to work together," Herdman said.

Praise also came from Delaware's congressional delegation.

## Additional Facts

### WHERE ALL THE MONEY WILL GO

The U.S. Department of Education awarded Delaware \$100 million Monday as part of the federal Race to the Top program. The state applied for \$107 million, so some adjustments might be made to the spending plans submitted as part of the state's application.

Here's a look at what major components of the state's plan could cost during the next four years, as outlined in the grant application.

- Standards and assessments: \$5,856,360. This would include a new common assessment for students, training teachers to use test score data to "inform instruction," development of the SAT as the statewide assessment for college readiness, investment in an Advanced Placement Summer Institute, and support to the state's Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) program coordinating council.
  - Teachers and leaders: \$37,371,621. This includes educator preparation programs, a teacher residency program that rewards those who serve in high-need schools, an online marketing and application site for teacher recruitment, creation of data and development coaches to work with teachers, principal training, retention bonuses for highly effective teachers, and academic achievement awards for high-performing schools.
  - Turnaround schools: \$8,240,099. This includes providing supplemental support for low-achieving schools in Partnership Zones, with three schools included in 2011-2012 and another seven schools in 2012-2013.
  - A new statewide data system: \$6,993,884. About \$6 million of this cost would be covered by another grant. If the state does not get that grant, the costs will be funded at the state level.
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