



## Delaware's teamwork pays off in backing education reform

March 30, 2010

Roll out the confetti.

Delaware won a big one Monday.

The U.S. Department of Education named Delaware as one of only two states to win the first round of the "Race to the Top" competition to improve schools.

The state will see about \$100 million over the next four years to implement a wide-ranging reform plan that could help boost the quality of Delaware schools.

Congratulations are in order. They should go first to Gov. Jack Markell and state Secretary of Education Lillian Lowery, who led a delegation to Washington earlier this year to argue Delaware's case.

Other members of the delegation were Diane Donahue, president of the Delaware State Education Association, Marvin "Skip" Schoenhals, former WSFS CEO and Vision 2015 chairman, and Merv Daugherty, superintendent of the Red Clay School District.

Hundreds of others deserve congratulations, too -- in education, government, business and private life.

Why?

Because that cooperation among "stakeholders," as the Race to the Top program calls them, was essential to winning the award.

That makes important sense.

What good does it do to have a great reform plan if statewide political and territorial squabbles prevent it from being implemented?

According to a number of observers, Delaware and the other winning state, Tennessee, had good plans and a good history of leading school reform. But, more important, both states had 100 percent support from the teachers union, the superintendents and the business community.

In other words, the parties that matter most in implementing reform were behind it.

Contrast that with two other states, Florida and Louisiana, which were considered to have strong plans. However, the teachers unions in those states failed to back the reform proposals. Two states in the running, North Carolina and Kentucky, had the buy-in from stakeholders, but observers considered their plans weaker.

So Delaware and Tennessee hit the mark with strong plans and solid support.

Now it is up to the states to follow through.

Gov. Markell said Delaware will be using the money to help implement its new assessment testing. Unlike previous achievement tests, which got a once-a-year snapshot of the student, the new assessment will follow the student over time, giving teachers and parents the opportunity to guide and correct

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progress.

This approach will give everyone -- administrator, parent, teacher and student -- the **tools** to help each student achieve at a higher level. It also will enable the state to evaluate individual teachers as well as schools to make sure that progress is made.

But, as the governor himself indicated Monday, none of these things matter -- not the award, the publicity, the money -- if the programs doesn't help the **student**.

The goals may be lofty, but they mean nothing if they don't help, as the governor said, the students progress.

So that tough plan has to be implemented and all the stakeholders have to do their part, especially when tougher decisions have to be made down the road.

But for now, with a hard-earned Race to the Top award in hand, Gov. Markell and his team should take a victory lap.

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