



Educators rejoice at good news

Despite positive reactions, some concerned with methods

By EDWARD L. KENNEY • The News Journal •
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Terry Schooley has worked in education most of her life. When the Democratic state representative from Newark heard Delaware won federal Race to the Top dollars, she began shouting with joy.

"It's wonderful," she said. "Now the work begins."

Schooley, chairwoman of the House Education Committee, said she began to think Delaware had a good chance of being selected as she traveled to out-of-state conferences.

"People would talk about Delaware with these glowing terms," said Schooley, a former elementary-school music teacher and nine-year former member of the Christina School District board. "People outside the state have such a high opinion of things that happened here, and we just don't realize it."

While most reaction in the state was positive, there were pockets of apprehension.

"The first word you should put next to mine is concern," said current Christina board member John Young. "I'm concerned that the programs that Race to the Top demands of us for turning around persistently lowest-achieving schools, none of them are proven to work, not one."

"There's nothing out there that proves or disproves," he said. "What we are essentially doing is going into laboratory mode. We are testing."

Lake Forest School District Superintendent Dan Curry was one of those hailing the announcement that the state will receive \$100 million over four years.

"A lot of work went into the application," he said of the state's request. "And now that that has paid off, that means a lot of work is going to go back to districts. It seemed like at one point, all the efforts and the buy-in was at a higher level. Now, all that work and planning will be pushed down to the school districts."

Red Clay Consolidated School District Superintendent Merv Daugherty was part of a team that went to Washington earlier this month to present Delaware's education plan to the U.S. Department of Education.

"I think Delaware had a perfect plan for where we wanted to go," he said.

Parent Dana Thompkins, who has a son at the Prestige Academy charter school in Wilmington and a daughter at Harlan Elementary School in the Brandywine School District, called the announcement "great news."

"They can use the money to help the students close the achievement gap, and to help the schools get different programs within the schools to help the schools and students," she said.

Jane Parker, a social studies teacher at Middletown

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High School in the Appoquinimink School District, used words such as "wonderful" and "phenomenal" to describe her reaction to the news.

"I'm already thinking of different things our department could utilize," she said. "I'm also the department chair. It's like, 'Oh, what can we do?' One of the biggest things would be **technology**."

John Mackenzie, a board member in the Christina School District, said he welcomes the federal money -- even though it won't help the district with long-term operating needs that have resulted in the board asking for an almost \$19 million referendum in May.

"I'm eager to see this partnership come about, and I think we're going to benefit," he said. "We're in very bad **financial** straits right now. We've got to find dollars where we can. The expectation is we're going to be a key partner in this. This is going to provide some short-term benefit."

New Castle County Councilman Jea Street said the extra money means he will demand that the state implement legislation that was supposed to accompany the Neighborhood Schools Act of 2000. Wilmington was supposed to go from four school districts to two, but that hasn't happened, he said.

"We were supposed to get more local control and never did," he said. "We're not going to let this be a race to the top for them and a run to the bottom for our kids. We want to go to two districts serving the city and the other things we were promised and never got."

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