



July 17, 2008

## Grant money to be shared by 10 schools

\$295,000 part of Vision 2015 plan

By RICARDO LOPEZ  
*The News Journal*

Ten Delaware schools in the Vision 2015 Network will share grants totaling \$295,000 to fund projects targeted at improving student performance.

Funded by the education nonprofit Rodel Foundation of Delaware, the grants will support custom school initiatives as part of the Vision 2015 school reform plan. Schools that applied for the grants, ranging from \$17,000 to \$30,000, submitted proposals outlining specific areas in which they wanted to improve such areas as literacy, critical thinking and writing.

Vision 2015 -- drafted in 2006 by a coalition of community, business and education leaders -- is a broad-ranging reform plan aimed at revamping the state's public school system into a world leader by 2015. Estimated to cost more than \$100 million over several years to fully implement, it has received some private support but no major public funding.

Paul Herdman, Rodel's president and CEO, said Vision 2015's nine-member implementation team evaluated schools for the grants based on their readiness and ability to implement their projects. Network schools' leadership teams attended training sessions in the past year, collaborating with other school and instructional professionals. During the sessions, leadership teams looked at their schools' test scores and other data to determine which areas to focus on for improvement.

Mark Steele, principal at Indian River High School in Dagsboro, was enthusiastic about hearing his school won a grant.

"It was a really lengthy process. You really had to know planning-wise what you wanted to do and how to get there," he said.

Steele's school is focusing on improving students' critical thinking skills. Beginning this fall, the Indian River District school will implement math and reading labs for students as well as a "Twilight Program," an evening online school to remediate credit deficiencies and accelerate students. Also in the works is a ninth-grade academy to begin in fall 2009 to help students better transition to high school.

"A lot of kids tend to struggle during the freshman year," Steele said. "Kids can come in and make sure they're all aware of rules, teach them proper study habits, some character-building skills and spend time with kids to develop a four-year plan."

Evelyn Edney, principal at New Castle County Vo-Tech's Howard High School of Technology in Wilmington, and her leadership team chose literacy skills as a focus.

"When you look at test scores, math scores were telling us that students needed to determine meaning more," she said. "Students can read, but when you look at what they took when reading and applying it to different situations, we felt students can work on that a little more."

In addition to using the grants to implement programs at their schools, funds will help pay for travel expenses for New Castle County Vo-Tech's St. Georges High School literacy team to visit a Long Island high school noted nationally for closing the achievement gap between minority students and other students.

"We want to see what their best practices are and try to bring them back to our school," said Terri Villa, principal at St. Georges.

Herdman said he hopes to include more schools in the Vision Network. Created in 2007, the network now has 21 schools: 17 from six districts and four charter schools.

Progress at the 10 schools will be monitored by third-party evaluators from the American Institute of Research and Vision Network staff, Herdman said. The grants are awarded on an annual basis, and schools will have to reapply for funds next year.

"We think it's going to make a huge difference in our student achievement," Steele said.

---