



Delaware schools: State hands Moyer to private firm

Va. company will manage failed charter school

By NICHOLE DOBO and SARAH LAWSON • The
News Journal • July 17, 2010

WILMINGTON -- The Moyer Academy Charter School will reopen this fall under the direction of a Virginia-based company, marking the first time Delaware has handed management of a public school to a private company.

The deal ends months of uncertainty over the school, which was marked for closing by the state Board of Education in February for failing to meet academic and operating criteria for its charter renewal.

"At times it seemed unlikely that we would be here," Gov. Jack Markell said at the school Friday. "In fact, sometimes it seemed impossible. But we are here because we are ready to start a new chapter in the life of Moyer Academy."

The state cited its willingness to close Moyer in its winning federal Race to the Top grant application. In return for taking the \$119 million, the state promised to take bold action to reform chronically under-performing schools.

Moyer will open Sept. 7 under the direction of K12 Inc., a company selected by the state several months ago. The state decided to consider reopening the school because Moyer is the city's only traditional high school option and the decision to close it came after the school-choice window had closed.

The school's namesake -- the Rev. Maurice J. Moyer, a beloved city civil rights leader -- said he is grateful the school will remain open.

"You know, I can sleep tonight," Moyer said. "I have been wrestling with this for a long time because there are almost 500 children and parents involved."

It remains to be seen how many students will choose to enroll there, but state, city and community leaders vowed Friday to make Moyer one of the best schools in Delaware.

"This is our school. This is our community and these are our children," said Sen. Margaret Rose Henry, D-Wilmington East. "You see ministers, you see community leaders, and you see elected officials. We're all here to pledge our support and our commitment to our young people. To pledge that we're not going to let you fail, that we're going to pick you up, advise you and help you along the way."

K12 Inc. has been advertising for teachers and leaders. Former staff members were invited to apply, and some will be invited to return, said Jeff Kwitowski, a company spokesman. Moyer's entire staff was laid off.

Experienced

K12 has seven weeks to prepare for students. The company, best known for its online charter schools, has experience working in troubled schools, said Edwin P. Freddie, a vice president at K12 who will lead the efforts at Moyer. K12 last year took over a New Orleans high school and elementary school. The first-year gains in test scores reached double digits, Freddie said.

Advertisement

The advertisement features the USA TODAY logo at the top. Below it, the word "AutoPilot" is written in a large, bold, black font, with a blue airplane icon to its right. Underneath, a smartphone displays the app's interface, showing a "USA TODAY Meeting" for Sep 21, 2009, and a flight schedule for BNA to IAD. To the right of the phone, text reads "The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®". Below this, it says "Presented by: Hampton" with the Hampton logo. At the bottom right, a blue button says "SEE HOW IT WORKS »".

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



K12, a publicly traded company that's reported consistent revenue growth this year, was founded in 2000 by Ron Packard, an economist and engineer, and by Bill Bennett, secretary of education in the Reagan administration.

"Our mission is quite simple: to deliver a great education to as many children as possible in whatever setting that may be," said Packard, who was in Wilmington Friday for the Moyer announcement.

Moyer is the second charter school to be closed by the Board of Education since the General Assembly approved Delaware's charter law in 1995. In 2008, Marion T. Academy in Wilmington was closed for several deficiencies, including failure to meet student performance goals.

'Restart'

Under Race to the Top, the state plans to guide 10 low-performing schools in the next four years through a program called Partnership Zones. Moyer was not selected as one of those schools, but actions taken by the state over the last few months at Moyer fit into the "restart" school-reform choice.

The four choices for Partnership Zone school reform are closure -- shutting down the school; restart -- handing over management to a private company or turning it into a charter school; turnaround -- removing the principal and at least half the teachers; or transformation. That last choice has four components -- replacing the principal and increasing school leader effectiveness; instructional reforms; increasing learning time; and creating community-oriented schools with operational flexibility.

Since Moyer opened in 2006, students have failed to score at the state's average level for any grade or subject. Last year's test scores, released Thursday by the state, placed the school last for grades eight and 10. The most stunning results were for 10th-grade students: just 9 percent scored proficient in reading and 5 percent were proficient in math.

A deal to lease Moyer's East 17th Street building will be signed Monday by the owners of the building, The Reinvestment Fund Inc., a Philadelphia nonprofit, and K12 Inc. Details of that arrangement were not released Friday, nor was a contractual agreement with the state.

Parent Terrell Copeland, a former member of Moyer's parent engagement advisory team, sent her three daughters to the school last year. At first word of the school's closing, she decided to send them elsewhere.

'Heck of a job'

"I loved Moyer under the administration that it was under previously," Copeland said. "They had their little kinks and everything like any other school ... in the first four years, they did a heck of a job."

The school is an important part of a revitalization effort in Northeast Wilmington, a poor and crime-plagued part of the city. Keeping a school there is crucial, Mayor James M. Baker said.

"My personal belief is that education is the major battleground for African-Americans, and if we don't make that battleground and win it I don't see a great deal of a future for a lot of young people in our communities," Baker said. "To abandon these facilities and make them empty, or try to refill them with something else, would have been criminal."

The deal to reopen Moyer this fall began to wane in late June as negotiations for a takeover of the building broke down. The plan was scuttled after the school's former leader, Theo K. Gregory, and the school's board of directors said they might sell some of the school's equipment to settle debts.

Advertisement

The advertisement features the USA TODAY logo at the top left, followed by the word "AutoPilot" in a large, bold, black font with a blue airplane icon to its right. Below this, a smartphone screen displays the app's interface, showing a "USA TODAY Meeting" for Sep 21, 2009, with flight details for A6 from BNA to IAD, weather for Washington (DAD) as Partly Cloudy, and a link to view a Flickr gallery of Washington. To the right of the phone, text reads "The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®". At the bottom right, it says "Presented by: Hampton" with the Hampton logo, and a blue button with white text that says "SEE HOW IT WORKS »".

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

Absent

On Friday, Gregory was notably absent from an event held at the school to announce the reopening. More than a dozen community, city and state leaders joined the school's new **management team** to herald plans to open in the fall.

Gregory founded the school, something noted by the Rev. Silvester S. Beaman of Wilmington's Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

"These halls will still remember it was Theo Gregory who brought them to the promised land," he said. "He had the dream. He brought us to this point."

A statement issued by Gregory said the school's former leaders "truly appreciate the governor remaining steadfast in his efforts to keep Moyer open, despite sincere negotiating disagreements in this transition."

Contact Nichole Dobo at 324-2281 or ndobo@delawareonline.com.



Purchase this Photo
Students leave Moyer Middle School at the end of a school day in March. The state Board of Education announced in February that it had refused to renew the school's charter. (News Journal file/SUCHAT PEDERSON)



Sen. Margaret Rose Henry pledged that Moyer will not fail.



Purchase this Photo
Moyer Academy's namesake, the Rev. Maurice Moyer (left), greets the Rev. Aaron Moore after the announcement Friday that the school will reopen. "I can sleep tonight," said the civil rights leader. (The News Journal JENNIFER CORBETT)

TO REGISTER

Registration for Moyer Academy Charter School will be at the H. Fletcher Brown Boys & Girls Club, 1601 Spruce St., Wilmington.

Advertisement

Mom Dilemma #36:
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

momlike.me.com
where Local moms meet

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



Tuesday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Wednesday from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Thursday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and a parent meeting from 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Friday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

On the Web

Delaware Department of Education
Maurice J. Moyer Academy

Advertisement

USA TODAY
AutoPilot 

The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®

Presented by: 

SEE HOW IT WORKS »

The advertisement shows a smartphone screen with the USA TODAY AutoPilot app interface. The screen displays a 'USA TODAY Meeting' for Sep 21, 2009, with flight details for A6 (BNA to IAD Landed 09/21/2009 11:48 AM) and weather for Washington (IAD) as Partly Cloudy with a temperature of 73°. It also includes links to view a Flickr gallery of Washington and articles about hotel deals in Hilton Hotels' picks.

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™