



State opens dialogue on education

Conversation will continue after NBC event

By NICHOLE DOBO • The News Journal • September 28, 2010

Conrad Schools of Science educator Beth Blohm is in New York City showing the nation how she infuses technology into her science classroom.

Blohm, who has taught at the Red Clay Consolidated District school since 1999, was invited to take part in "Education Nation," NBC News' two-day nationally televised series on education reform. She's in one of five classroom-like structures in Rockefeller Plaza that can be seen during the televised event.

"Just watching the actual newscast and seeing how many people who are in the audience caring about education is incredible," Blohm said. "Basically, it's causing some conversations, not creating solutions. We are just getting the debate going here."

"Education Nation" drew teachers, policy wonks and politicians from across the nation. Gov. Jack Markell was among the participants Monday. The conversation about education reform will continue this week in Delaware.

Today, the University of Delaware will host a seminar called "Race to Deliver," which will focus on statewide efforts to improve public schools. And state leaders from across the country will be in Delaware on Wednesday to learn about the state's education reform plans. A series of community meetings, called "Conversations About Stronger Schools," will take place across the state through the end of the year.

Delaware was one of two winners of first-round funding for President Barack Obama's \$4.35 billion education reform initiative. Nine states and the District of Columbia were named second-round winners in late August. Delaware won \$119 million for the four-year program, which aims to encourage states to turn around failing schools, boost student achievement and reward teachers who excel.

"The winning is long behind us and now we are engaged in this collaborative process ... to make this happen," Markell said.

During Monday's "Education Nation" event, Obama called his Race to the Top federal grant program "probably the most powerful tool for reform that we've seen in decades."

But critics say it's too soon to call Race to the Top a success. This is the first year of the program, there is no data linking it to improved schools and it's not a "magnificent game changer," said Neal P. McCluskey of the Washington, D.C.-based Cato Institute, a conservative think tank. The recent national attention on reform efforts isn't likely to spur any changes, he said.

"I think it has an off-chance of maybe moving education reform up the list of public concerns," McCluskey said, "but I don't think it's going to start any meaningful reform."

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'Conversations About Stronger Schools'

Gov. Jack Markell, Delaware Secretary of Education Lillian Lowery and other education leaders will host a series of 10 public meetings this year called "Conversations About Stronger Schools." All meetings begin at 6:30 p.m. and are open to the public.
TONIGHT: Keene Elementary School, 200 Lagrange Ave., Newark
WEDNESDAY: Concord High School, 2501 Ebright Rd., Wilmington
Oct. 21: Lake Forest North Elementary, 319 E. Main

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