

\$75 million investment supports neediest students



In southern New Castle County, low-income and English learner preschoolers attend a free early childhood education program. That is just one example of how Delaware school districts and charter schools are using new state investments to support some of the First State's neediest students.

Last year Governor John Carney developed the three-year, \$60 million Opportunity Funding initiative to target resources toward Delaware's most disadvantaged students. For the first time in Delaware, the state is providing weighted funding for every low-income and English learner student. Every Delaware school district and charter is receiving a per-pupil appropriation for each English learner and low-income student and has the opportunity to make investments that make the most sense for their local communities. Carney and members of the General Assembly also devoted an additional \$15 million over three years for mental health and reading supports for high-needs Delaware schools.

Preschool investments

Appoquinimink School District invested its three-year, \$500,000 Opportunity Grant in establishing the preschool program at Brick Mill Elementary School, a first-of-its-kind program for the Middletown-Odessa-Townsend community.

“High quality pre-kindergarten is one of the best investments we can make. It’s linked to fuller, richer lives for children and their families,” Appoquinimink Preschool Program and Preschool Labs Director Kim Brancato said.

The Appoquinimink program features research-based best practices including small class size, low student-teacher ratios, extra supports for English learners and students with special needs, rich and varied curricular materials, high quality professional development for staff, and wrap-around services. Transportation is provided at no cost and a subsidized before- and after-care program operates on site.

“Preschool is so much more than playing. When children are young, they’re learning sponges. It’s the time when educators can have their greatest impact – so it’s crucial that we use this opportunity to expand the potential of early learners who come from homes that are economically disadvantaged and/or young children who face the added challenge of learning (and communicating) in a language that presents a barrier to participating,” Superintendent Matt Burrows said.

Extended learning after school

The Milford School District has used the Opportunity Funding to start an after-school program with tutoring support for students. At Benjamin Banneker Elementary School, teachers are helping to close students’ achievement gaps by providing additional support in both reading and mathematics. The grant also has provided bus funding so schools can reach those students who may not have been able to stay before due to transportation issues.

“The AHOY program (Academic Help for Our Youth) has helped students grow academically. We are already seeing a difference in our students,” Director of Student Learning Bridget Amory said.

Teachers who provide the tutoring support said they see how their students are benefiting.

“The grant has allowed us to work in smaller groups with students. We have been able to focus on the skills they need. I have seen a lot of growth already,” Cole Pavlik said.

Colleague Yaritza Reyna agreed: “It has benefited them so much. It made them grow academically. Other teachers have noticed the students’ growth in their classrooms.”

Mispillion Elementary leaders said they can tell how much students enjoy the AHOY program by its attendance rate of more than 98 percent.

“They enjoy the hands-on activities that they are doing, which is different from in-the-classroom experiences. Our students in grades 2-5 get to rotate to different teachers, which helps them experience different teaching styles and activities as well as bond with other staff members,” Amory said. “We do thematic teaching of our units of study. One

third-grade student said to the program director, 'I am excited about reading and my grades have improved, which makes my Mother and I happy.' "

Multi-tiered support system

At Providence Creek Academy in Clayton, Opportunity Funding has had a direct impact to the achievement of students, Head of School Denise Stouffer said.

"The funding for this grant has allowed our school to implement a new multi-tiered support system that has resulted in tremendous growth for our children struggling with math and reading," she said.

The MTSS Reading Program rotations include five stations: Read A New Book, Phonics and Word Study, ReRead A Book, Guided Writing, and Computers (Dream Box, Phonics Games, or Epic Read Aloud).

"The students are showing tremendous growth and having fun while learning!" Stouffer said.

Investments to meet local needs

The Caesar Rodney School District used the Opportunity Funding to increase services for its growing English learner population by hiring additional English as a second language teachers at the elementary and high school levels as well as hiring two paraprofessionals who, in addition to providing in-class support to students, assist families as they navigate the enrollment process.

The four schools in the district with the highest number of English learners (Nellie Stokes Elementary School, Postlethwait and Fifer middle schools, and Caesar Rodney High School) have started afterschool programs to provide additional supports to students in reading and math. Students who attend the afterschool programs receive a healthy snack and transportation is provided. Many of these programs will extend through the summer.

Aligned with multiple goals of Delaware's Early Childhood Strategic Plan, the district also has been working with the teachers and administrators of pre-kindergarten programs and child care centers that feed into McIlvaine Early Childhood Center to strengthen the academic and language supports so all students are ready to enter kindergarten and close the opportunity gap for CR's low-income students. This work has included, developing a more robust outreach effort to locate and enroll "future Riders" in a pre-kindergarten program, identifying students for services, providing effective instructional materials and professional development to the sites, providing pre-k students with home starter libraries, and utilizing an early childhood language use observation rubric to help prekindergarten educators determine the language level of students.

"This funding has allowed us to support our students in new ways. The flexibility to design programs that cater to our district's needs was critical. We locally identified where the investments would be most valuable and planned programming and hired staff to provide those services," Supervisor of Instruction Darren Guido said.

Over the next three years, the Delaware Department of Education will work with district and school leaders, community representatives, parents and educators to evaluate how districts and schools are using the funding, and to measure students' progress.



Providence Creek students enjoy the MTSS Reading Program rotations.



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Learn more about how the schools in your community are using this funding here ([LINK](#)).