



School district officials begin training

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Administrators in Chambersburg Area School District welcomed two state education leaders to the first day of its 18-month leadership training program on Wednesday.

Pennsylvania Department of Education Secretary Gerald Zahorchak came to Chambersburg to offer his blessings to the district for putting its administrators through the National Institute for School Leaders training program. Former Massachusetts Commissioner of Education David Driscoll, now a consultant with NISL, spoke to the leaders earlier in the day.

"Chambersburg will gain (from these visits) the practical knowledge and applications that we can apply to our district," Director of Curriculum and Instruction Chris Bigger said. "(Driscoll) is already experienced in the NISL program. He will give us lots of words of wisdom on what works and what didn't. It will be nice to talk to someone who's already done this. It may not fit Chambersburg's exact makeup, but we can take from his experiences and apply it to ours."

Chambersburg school board voted in February to spend \$250,000 -- all federal Title I grant money -- over two budgets to put 28 of its leaders through the NISL program. The district is required under its Correction Action 1 plan -- handed down by PDE based on state standardized test scores -- to allocate at least 10 percent of its federal Title I funding toward professional development.

The district in the 2007-08 school year received an estimated \$1.5 million in federal Title I funds, and has allotted about \$300,000 toward professional development.

"Teachers matter most, but principals matter, too. You can not have great schools unless you have a great principal," Zahorchak said. "Every investment you can make into capacity building for principals and teachers you should take."

Officials opted for NISL -- a program based on six years of research and design related to the most effective leadership programs worldwide -- because it's a program that is recognized by the state, and officials said they felt it is proven to be effective. Driscoll said NISL was implemented in Massachusetts during his tenure as commissioner. He said the program, coupled with a comprehensive education reform plan, helped to take the state to the top of the student achievement chart.

His belief in the program is what led him to sign on as a consultant after retirement in August, he said.

"The message I'm sending today is that we are in a very tough time, and we're losing the international and global competitions," Driscoll said. "It's a splash of cold water in the face that I'm giving them, but we need to begin to make some changes (to improve student achievement)."

Zahorchak and NISL founder Robert Hughes said Chambersburg's commitment to leadership training will help the district's students better meet performance standards.

The state now knows what is necessary to see 100 percent of students achieve proficiency and is making strides to see that school districts reach that milestone, Zahorchak said. He said professional development is one of those necessities.

"(NISL) is probably the hardest work (principals) will undergo in terms of professional development, but is also the most relevant," Zahorchak said.

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