

School Board agrees to seek Race to Top grant that could secure at least \$168,000 for educational reforms

The Port Washington-Saukville School Board on Monday unanimously approved a grant application that could secure at least \$168,160 in federal stimulus funding for the district.

The district is one of several school systems in the county that has applied to be part of the Race to the Top program, an American Recover and Reinvestment Act initiative that is providing \$4 billion to states to promote education innovations and reforms.

States must compete for the funding, but if Wisconsin's application is accepted, all participating school districts in the state would be guaranteed a share of the stimulus money, Supt. Michael Weber said.

Wisconsin's share of the \$4 billion stimulus package would be about \$254 million. That money would be distributed to school districts based on the Title 1 federal school aid formula, which provides funding based on the number of students from low-income families.

The Port Washington-Saukville School District's share would be at least \$168,160 and could be significantly more if other districts in the state choose not to participate in the program, Weber said.

"Why wouldn't a district participate? You would opt out if the energy and investment required to use the money was greater than the amount you're receiving," he said.

If Wisconsin receives funding, participating school districts have 90 days to prepare a spending plan or opt out of the program.

"We're not committing to anything at this point," Weber said.

In other school systems, such as the Northern Ozaukee School District in Fredonia, the decision to submit an application was not nearly as cut and dried as it was in the Port-Saukville District. The board in that district voted 6-3 Monday to apply for the funding. The Grafton School District also decided Monday to apply.

PW-S district to pursue stimulus funds

Written by Bill Schanen IV

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The stimulus money is intended to promote reforms in four areas — standards and assessments that prepare students for college and the workplace; creating data systems that measure student achievement and facilitate improvement in instruction; recruiting and retaining effective teachers and principals; and improving low-performing schools.

“We are already doing these things and have been for a long time,” Weber said. “But this money would allow us to improve and expand what we’re doing.”

For instance, the money would allow the district to improve its new-staff mentoring program to ensure recently hired educators are as successful as possible, he said.

Funding could also be used to help implement Project Lead the Way at the high school. The science, math and technology program intended to spark student interest in engineering careers was started this year at the middle school.

“We’re running into significant challenges trying to fund the program at the high school,” Weber said.

“And overlooked sometimes are initiatives in science and mathematics at the elementary schools. Technology is a huge priority for us and this funding (Race to the Top) could help with that goal.”

Receiving the money, however, is far from certain and depends on whether Wisconsin can convince federal education officials it has a sound plan for education reform. The debate over the Milwaukee Public School System’s performance and its future leadership is central to Wisconsin’s chances of qualifying for funding, Weber said.

“The MPS issue is very significant,” he said. “The State of Wisconsin needs to be able to put together a plan to restructure MPS to help students be more successful, and to do that they’re going to have to address problems like truancy, the drop-out rate and the achievement gap.”