

# **Governor Carney, Legislators Announce Bills to Make Opportunity Funding Permanent, Expand K-3 Special Education**

**Opportunity Funding targets state resources for English learners and low-income students; funding will reach \$60M annually by FY2025**

**WILMINGTON, Del.** – Governor John Carney and members of the General Assembly on Thursday announced legislation to increase funding and classroom-based support for low-income students, English learners, and young Delaware students with special needs.

[Senate Bill 56](#), sponsored by Senator Laura Sturgeon, expands, and makes permanent Delaware’s Opportunity Funding program. The weighted funding program provides direct, classroom-based support for low-income students and English learners. By Fiscal Year 2025, funding for the program would more than double to \$60 million annually.

[House Bill 86](#), sponsored by Representative Kim Williams, fully funds basic special education services for Delaware children in grades K-3. The legislation closes the gap in funding for Delaware’s youngest learners with special needs and makes basic special education funding consistent across grade levels.

*“My top priority remains the same, and I know it’s one that*

*many legislators share. We need to ensure that our most disadvantaged students are getting the education they need and deserve,” said **Governor Carney**. “Our Opportunity Funding program is already providing direct, classroom-based supports for low-income students and English learners. These pieces of legislation will build on that effort and close the gap for young students with special needs. Thank you to Senator Sturgeon, Representative Williams and all members of the General Assembly for their partnership on these important pieces of legislation.”*

“We have a unique opportunity this year to begin to correct longstanding issues of inequality in our public education system across Delaware, and I am confident that we will meet this moment and make lasting, positive change,” said **Representative Kim Williams**, prime sponsor of House Bill 86. “With respect to special education, research has proven that early identification and intervention are critical to a child’s overall success. By the time a child reaches third grade, they should be transitioning from learning to read to reading to learn. If we are committed to fundamentally improving the quality of education in our state, then we must make a commitment early on.”

“For far too long, our state has failed to adequately fund special education in the earliest grades when some of our most vulnerable children need additional support to help keep them from falling behind,” said **Senator Nicole Poore**, the Senate prime sponsor of House Bill 86. “For six years, Rep. Williams and I have been fighting to bring K-3 basic special education funding in line with the higher grades. Thank you to her, our educators and all of the advocates who have fought alongside of us to fundamentally improve the quality of education in Delaware for all students.”

“In my 25 years of teaching public school in Delaware, I saw students from all backgrounds and circumstances rise to

challenges and thrive academically and socially during their time in my class and beyond, but I also saw students, especially those from low-income households, struggle with coursework and attendance due to a variety of unmet needs, many of which we can address in our school buildings with adequate funding,” said **Senator Laura Sturgeon**, chair of the Senate Education Committee and prime sponsor of SB 56. “Whether it’s one-on-one time after school for extra help or access to a good counselor to work through trauma, or smaller class sizes to help with focus and attention, these Opportunity Funds will allow schools to address the needs of our most vulnerable students. I am proud to sponsor SB 56 as an important step toward closing the achievement gap caused by circumstances outside students’ control. We owe our future generation nothing less.”

“The Delawareans For Educational Opportunity and the NAACP are pleased that the Governor and members of the General Assembly have introduced legislation consistent with our shared goal of giving all of Delaware’s students a fair shot at a good education,” said **Jea Street, on behalf of DEO and NAACP**. “This historic legislation is an important piece of a systemic shift toward a more equitable education for all of Delaware’s students. It is our fervent hope that this legislation is approved and the programs that it supports are implemented without compromise or delay, and we look forward to working with the General Assembly and the Governor to make that happen.”

“This legislation reflects years of work and advocacy by so many to provide additional resources to our highest needs students. But, we still have a long road ahead to ensure funding is directed to programs and educators that are needed the most,” said **Stephanie Ingram, President of the Delaware State Education Association**. “We recognize that Governor Carney is the first governor to acknowledge that our English learner students, low income students, and special education

students need more support in their school day than others. We thank him, and look forward to working with him on similar initiatives that will provide additional support to Delaware students in need.”

“Since 2015, when I served as Chair of the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee (WEAC) and the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission (WEIC), we solicited input on educational equity from Delaware parents, lawmakers, educators, and community partners alike. Not a single person suggested that the last 60 years of K-12 education for students from economically distressed communities was sustainable, appropriate, or fair,” said **Dr. Tony Allen, President, Delaware State University**. “Today, with the introduction of SB 56 and HB 86, we take another significant step toward the only goal that matters in public education: improving equity and access for ALL. I am particularly pleased to see that a permanent weighted funding system and fully funding K-3 statewide – both of which were pillars of our recommendations – are now going to receive the attention and debate that our children and their parents deserve. Waiting is no longer an option.”

“Delaware Hispanic Commission thanks Governor John Carney and Delaware Education Secretary Susan Bunting for proposing an increase to the Opportunity Funding initiative that targets dedicated per-pupil funding for English learners and low-income students,” said **Javier Torrijos, Chair of the Delaware Hispanic Commission**. “We believe, if passed by the legislature, this Opportunity Funding will help our students succeed. We see this as an important first step toward a long-term solution to ensure funding follows the students. We are committed to working with the legislature to pass the proposed funding and to advocate for the voices of English learning students, parents and teachers.”

“The Opportunity funding has already helped our students at Red Clay,” said **Kimberly Stock, Delaware Teacher of the Year**.

“We have been able to hire 28 additional staff with 18 of them English Learner staff and teachers. We were also able to have an after-school newcomer program in our high schools, and district staff and some middle and elementary schools were provided SIOP training which is necessary for all teachers to learn how to better utilize effective methods to teach our ELs. Also, we were able to purchase new curriculum for our ELs and reading support for our k-6 students. We are looking forward to permanent Opportunity Funding so we can continue to provide access and opportunity for our all of our students.”

“SB 56 is a major accomplishment, signaling that Delaware is addressing historic education funding disparities for students who come from low income communities and those that receive ELL services,” said **Dorrell Green, Superintendent of Red Clay Schools**. “The fact that Delaware has formally put permanent weighted funding into law is progress towards helping so many at promise students reach their full potential.”

“Needs based funding was a huge step forward for our state in providing more appropriate services and supports for our students with disabilities,” said **Dan Shelton, Superintendent, Christina School District**. “Modernizing our system to provide the appropriate level of support for our K-3 students with disabilities is a critical step forward to providing equitable services for all of our students.”

“The continued support through Opportunity Funding has provided our district with the ability to increase our programming for our most at-risk students,” said **Elyse Baerga, Supervisor of Student Services at Woodbridge School District**. “We were able to hire four additional EL teachers to support our English Language Learners, expand communication through translation services, and increase their access to the curriculum and other needed resources throughout the struggles of the pandemic. Our continued partnership with the Communities in Schools organization has helped to provide family supports, counseling as needed, and increased access to

our food pantries and other community-based initiatives that serve our Woodbridge community. We are grateful for these resources and know that without them our families would have faced greater challenges during this difficult time.”

“We are grateful for the Opportunity Funding and the additional support it allowed us to provide our students. For example, we were able to use the funds to create a reading program specifically geared towards English Learners,” said **Margie Lopez-Waite and Emily Edmonds-Eveland of Las Americas ASPIRA Academy**. “This program was a collaborative effort among several educators that dedicated the time to develop lesson plans to address the reading achievement gap among these students. Without this funding, we would not have been able to create this program or purchase the variety of reading materials needed to support students’ learning. Funding sources, such as the Opportunity Funding, that go above and beyond the unit count funding are critical to close the gaps in student achievement, which primarily impact English Learners, students of poverty and students of color. This type of funding serves as an equalizer to some extent.”

“The funding allows us to reach kids who wouldn’t get reached without this help. Now, through Opportunity Funding, our kids’ needs are getting met,” said **William Buczynski, Principal of South Dover Elementary School**

“Students in younger grades need the most support so that they can be prepared in later years. Proper support for students in Kindergarten to third grade means less support is needed for students in the future,” said **Aaron Bass, CEO, East Side Charter School**. “It is not only morally right to provide full funding to students in lower grades it is fiscally right as well. Millions of dollars can be saved if more children are able to access reading on grade level. The money we spend remediating students in high school and even adults who are underemployed or dealing with high recidivism rates can be

directly connected to the lack of support we give them as children. I fully support Special Education funding for students in K-3 as an educational leader and as a taxpayer of this great state.”

“We’re able to go above and beyond and add extra teachers in the classroom to work with English learners and help them catch up with their peers,” said **David Hudson, Principal, Georgetown Middle School.**

*[Learn more](#) about how public schools are using Opportunity Funding to support low-income students and English learners.*

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