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## Teach for America arrives in Del.

Top college graduates will work in highest-need schools; current teachers fear they will be displaced

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*The News Journal*

At least 20 college graduates will teach in Delaware's highest-need schools starting this fall under the national Teach for America program.

The nonprofit organization recruits college graduates to teach at urban and rural schools to help close the achievement gap. Officials announced last month they were considering expanding into Delaware, with plans to locate some of their corps members in the Red Clay Consolidated School District and in a number of charter schools in Wilmington.

The Christina School District also was offered the opportunity to participate but declined because officials said they needed time to review the details.

Announcing the program's expansion to Delaware, Mike Wang, executive director of Teach for America, said only 31 percent of Delaware eighth-graders are proficient in reading or math.

"Clearly there's a need," he said. "And at the same time, there is tremendous opportunity."

Teach for America teachers will be placed in Red Clay schools, to be determined when the district learns where its vacancies will be, and the charter schools Prestige Academy, East Side Charter, Kuumba Academy, Edison Charter School and Delaware College Preparatory Academy.

Christine Rowland, the director of curriculum and instruction at Prestige Academy and a former Teach for America corps member in Charlotte, N.C., said she is expecting three new teachers from the organization.

"I'm really excited about it," she said. "That just adds another level for us to impact the achievement gap."

Although organizers said no current teachers will be replaced, Barbara Finnan, grievance chair for the Red Clay Education Association, the district's teachers' union, said there are concerns because temporary teachers whose contracts were not renewed this year will not have first crack at the teaching jobs. She also questioned the new college graduates' qualifications for teaching.

"How can they be highly qualified when their backgrounds are not in education to begin with?" Finnan said of the corps members, many of whom graduate in areas outside that field.

Red Clay Superintendent Robert Andrzejewski, who is expecting six corps members at schools in his district, has heard about the concerns, but he said the 34 teachers whose temporary contracts were not renewed are not as qualified as the incoming corps members.

Diane Donohue, president of the Delaware State Education Association, the statewide teachers' union, said she has been in conversations with the Red Clay union about Teach for America.

"We're a little concerned," she said. "We don't want our current public education teachers displaced so a Teach for America person can have a job. Those [temporary] teachers need to have the first

opportunity to come into those positions. They have every right to come back and not be displaced by a Teach for America employee."

The announcement was made at Wilmington University, which will partner with Teach for America to help corps members work on their highly qualified teaching certificates. Legislation passed recently in Delaware paved the way to bring the corps members here, because it made it possible for them to earn their certificates as they teach.

"Wilmington University is excited to partner with Teach for America to help strengthen professional development for its corps members," said Betty Caffo, provost and vice president of academic affairs at the university. "I am confident that today is a significant day for education in Delaware."

The expansion into Delaware will bring 7,500 corps members to 33 regions nationwide next school year, including 4,100 new members, the largest entering class in the organization's 20-year history, Teach for America spokesman Steve Mancini said.

The new corps members, who must commit to at least two years' service, were selected from among 35,000 applicants this year, which is also a record number, he said. They include 11 percent of all Ivy League seniors and more than 100 graduating seniors from the University of Delaware.

Mancini said this year's recruits have an average SAT score of 1,333 and an average grade-point average of 3.6, and almost 90 percent have served as class president or in some other leadership capacity on their college campuses.

Of the 14,000 alumni of the program, two-thirds work or study full time in education, so bringing corps members into a given area helps bring in potential administrators, he said.

"In the next 10 years, a lot of administrators will be retiring, and we see this as a pipeline; it's a potential leadership pipeline," said John Carwell, vice president of community and district partnerships with the Rodel Foundation of Delaware, the education nonprofit that has backed bringing in the corps members. Rodel also is a proponent and financial backer of Vision 2015, the wide-ranging reform plan that seeks to make Delaware a world leader in education by that year.

Rodel Foundation President Paul Herdman said more than \$1 million has been committed for the next three years toward funding the program in Delaware, with support from Rodel, the Longwood Foundation and the business community.

Like in Red Clay, Teach for America's expansions also have been challenged recently by the Boston Teachers Union and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Association of Educators in North Carolina.

The teacher union in Boston recently sent a letter to Teach for America objecting to the 20 program recruits to be sent to the city's schools. The union has asked the school district and the nonprofit to end their contract to reduce expected teacher layoffs. Meanwhile in North Carolina, teachers are upset that Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools are hiring 100 Teach for America recruits at the same time that the district may lay off more than 400 classroom teachers.

But at Prestige Academy, Dana Thompkins is just thankful for help. Her son, Yento Blyden, 11, is a fifth-grader at the school.

"I think it's a great idea," she said of the Teach for America recruits. "Having those teachers come in and work with the school is going to be great for the kids."

Two Teach for America corps members are expected to come to Kuumba Academy and teach in the fourth and fifth grades. Four will teach kindergarten at Delaware College Preparatory Academy. Information about the number of teachers expected could not be obtained from East Side and Edison charter schools.

Sondra Shippen, head of school at Kuumba Academy, said the school would start the interviewing process to hire its Teach for America teachers by mid-June.

"We're excited by the opportunity," she said.

Ezra Temko, 23, who grew up in Newark and recently received his master's degree in public administration at the University of Delaware, could be one of them. Temko, also a Newark City Council member, said he had no idea initially that he would go into teaching or become a Teach for America corps member. He has been assigned to Delaware, but does not yet know which school.

"I wanted to do something dramatic and engaging, where I could do something in my community, so I thought about teaching," said Temko, who initially was assigned to Philadelphia but asked to come to Delaware. "I really wouldn't be teaching if not for the Teach for America program."

Delaware Sen. Tom Carper, D-Del., Rep. Mike Castle, R-Del., and Wilmington Mayor James Baker also attended the announcement at Wilmington University.

"I think it's an exciting opportunity for the children, and a way to attract some of these people who weren't even thinking about teaching when they attended some of the best colleges in America," Castle said. "I don't want to replace any of our existing teachers, but I don't think we're doing that. There are enough vacancies each year that this will be helping to fill those vacancies."

## Additional Facts

### FACTS

- Teach for America is a nonprofit program that trains top college graduates to teach in poor communities.
  - The organization provides five weeks of intensive summer training before the school year begins and requires a two-year commitment from recruits.
  - The program will send a record 4,100 new recruits into classrooms across the country this fall.
  - At least 20 recruits will be coming to schools in Delaware. The confirmed schools are: Prestige Academy, East Side Charter, Kuumba Academy, Edison Charter School and Delaware College Preparatory Academy. Some of the recruits also will be placed in still to be determined schools in Red Clay Consolidated School District.
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