

# MILFORD LIVE

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**February 20, 2024**  
**Vol. 14 • Issue 8**

- Headlines .....2
- Culture.....5
- Business ..... 10
- Government & Politics ..... 14
- Education..... 18
- Health .....23
- Stay Connected .....25

photo link: Milford School District



Milford Goes Green



Billboard Mocks City Council



Bayhealth Childcare Center

# HEADLINES



photo link: Dupont Nature Center



## MILFORD GOES GREEN

BY TERRY ROGERS

Businesses in Milford will be “Going Green” the entire month of March in order to promote shopping and dining throughout the city. Starting March 1, businesses will offer discounts and specials on items using either green price tags or items that are green to celebrate St. Patrick’s Day.

“We thought this would be a great way to get people to come to Milford and see what we have to offer,” Sara LeBright, interim executive director of Downtown Milford, Inc., said. “Although DMI is focused on growing our downtown area, we are hoping that all our businesses will hop on board to offer ‘green’ specials.”

The Go Green promotion is planned all month with the very popular St. Patty’s Day Pub Crawl celebrating the downtown area on March 16 from 6 p.m. until midnight. Buses are available to those who purchase

wristbands for \$25. The buses will travel from Arena’s on Northeast Front Street to EasySpeak Spirits, Mispillion River Brewing as well as Surf and Turf for festivities planned at those locations. In addition, downtown bars and restaurants will offer St. Patty’s Day specials and events.

“This is always such a popular event,” LeBright said. “We love seeing everyone dressed in costume as they ‘crawl’ through Milford for this event. This year, we are holding special raffles at various businesses, but you have to be present to win, so make sure you listen for those special announcements about where to be and when.”

Wristbands for the Pub Crawl can be purchased at the DMI office, 10 South Walnut Street or on [Eventbrite](#).

see page 4

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from page 3

The Irish excitement does not end with the Pub Crawl, however. On Sunday, March 24, the Irish Music and Dance Concert is planned at the Milford Senior Center from 1 to 4 p.m. This event features Seven Rings Irish Band and the McAleer Paulson Irish Dancers. Blarney the Leprechaun and bagpipers will also be on hand. Irish refreshments, including scones, soda bread, crackers and cheese jellies, along with coffee, tea and a cash bar are available.

“There is lots of dancing and excitement at this concert,” Eugenia Sparks, organizer of the concert, said. “It is just a really fun way to celebrate all things Irish and everyone who has attended talks about how much they enjoy it.”

Tickets for the Irish Music and Dance Concert are \$30 and available at Irish Rose Gift Shop at 42 N. Walnut Street in Milford or on [Eventbrite](#).

Sponsorships are still available for both the St. Patty’s Day Pub Crawl and the Irish Music and Dance Concert. To learn more, contact DMI at 302-839-1180 or email [Promotions@downtownmilford.org](mailto:Promotions@downtownmilford.org).



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# CULTURE



photo link: [Second Street Players](#)



## AWARD-WINNING PHOTOGRAPHY AVAILABLE AT MILFORD MUSEUM

BY TERRY ROGERS

The family of the late Melva Jane Bradford, whose landscape, animal and still life photos received multiple awards, donated a large portion of her collection to the Milford Museum. The items are now for sale.

“The collection contains a wide array of scenes, including landscapes, animals and still life,” Denise Curtis, a board member with the museum, said. “Some are framed and matted while others are available for you to surround with your own frame.”

Bradford grew up in the Milford-Frederica area but traveled the world as a member of the United States Air Force. After tours in Maine, Germany and Washington, DC, she was assigned to the Communications

Center at the Pentagon before transferring to Dover Air Force Base as the first enlisted single WAF. Although Bradford enjoyed being back in her native state, a promotion took her to Virginia where she passed away. At the time of her death, she was planning a move back to her home state.

“She was considered by many to be a renaissance woman,” Curtis said. “She owned and fixed her own cars, enjoyed computers and, of course, cameras. She saw beauty in everything as is evident in her photographs.”

Many of the photographs taken by Bradford can be found at the Delaware State Archives as well as the University of Delaware. Her work has also been featured in

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several books published by Holly Press in Hockessin. In addition to the collection of photographs, Bradford’s family donated \$500 to the museum.

Milford Museum is located at 121 S. Walnut Street in Milford. Their hours are 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. For more information, call 302-424-1080 or email [info@milfordmuseum.org](mailto:info@milfordmuseum.org). Photographs can also be purchased online by visiting the [Support](#) link on the museum website.

MILFORD  
LIVE



## FOOD BANK PROGRAMS LOOK BEYOND HANDING OVER BOX OF GROCERIES

BY KATIE KAZIMIR

“Food for today, food for tomorrow” doesn’t just refer to leftovers at the Food Bank of Delaware’s Milford branch. The motto encapsulates the nonprofit’s mission to provide Delawareans nourishing food as well as long-term solutions to poverty and hunger. “Food for today” meets the immediate needs of people by various efforts to distribute food, including home delivery, mobile food pantries and the Healthy Pantry Center.

“People are not stuck receiving food bank services forever. We’re not a vacuum,” said Chad Robinson, vice president of external affairs.

That’s where “food for tomorrow” comes in. It’s designed to help clients become self-sufficient through nutrition education, financial guidance and workforce training programs.

Healthy foods are often expensive, and research by the Food Bank of Delaware has found low-income pop-

ulations will stretch funds for foods with items of little to no nutritional value. Poor diets often contribute to or lead to chronic illness such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.

### Food Bank education

To help, the Food Bank’s **nutrition education** program such as Create Better Health and Food Smarts teach low-income adults — particularly those on government benefit programs — how to minimize waste while preparing healthy food.

“The nutrition education courses also teach clients how to take ingredients they have and stretch them further,” Robinson said.

A financial coaching program, **Stand By Me**, offers one-on-one support for people who want to understand money better. It also offers **assistance** applying for state benefits. Financial health is the goal, with clients gaining

see page 8



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from page 7

autonomy and independence as they plan their futures. Financial freedom will help clients to transition away from relying on food banks for immediate hunger needs.

The Food Bank also offers job training in the areas of food service, warehousing and logistics to help clients gain the skill certifications and experience necessary to obtain jobs.

Basic and high-end kitchen skills are taught by the Food Bank's **Culinary School**, a free 14-week program for unemployed, underemployed, returning citizens and those in career transition. The Culinary School students earn ServSafe training and certification, a requirement in most food handling jobs. The course culminates with a two-week paid work experience.

"The Culinary School offers adults a second chance by teaching skills to rejoin the workforce and have a career," Robinson said.

The **Kitchen School** is a free 12-week program for adults with disabilities. Students spend eight weeks at the Food Bank kitchen and four weeks transitioning to permanent employment through on-site job coaching.

"An instructor is by the student's side ensuring they are comfortable and confident as they start their new job," Robinson said.

The culinary team also runs the **Discover Cafe** at the Food Bank. It offers lunch and breakfast, with proceeds benefiting the training programs.

The free 14-week Logistics, Operations, General Warehousing and Inventory Control (L.O.G.I.C) program provides training for careers in warehousing and logistics industry.

see page 9

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Students can earn certifications such as forklift operation and handling hazardous materials, and also learn how to use warehouse machinery. Current student Dawson Warrington said he'd recommend L.O.G.I.C. to anyone who wants to work in a warehouse. "This is the right way to do the program," Warrington said.

He would know. An accident caused by a forklift operator while working at a Kentucky warehouse has had Warrington unemployed since September 2019. He said there was minimal training on forklift operation there and safety was not a priority.

"That place was always in a rush. It's unacceptable," Warrington said.

He said he appreciates the course because safety always comes first. "I'm particular about that because of what happened to me," he said. "I'm lucky to be here."

Outside of the focus on safety, Warrington said the focus on building a strong foundation of teamwork has impressed him. "As a group we're a well-oiled machine," he said.

After completing the L.O.G.I.C. training, Warrington hopes to become a safety specialist for the Milford Food Bank of Delaware. "I think I found my calling," he said.

The support from and camaraderie of volunteers, staff and fellow students has fostered hope for a bright future for Warrington. "Everyone here wants to help you succeed," he said. Warrington encourages anyone in need of food or workforce training to use the services offered by the Milford Food Bank of Delaware.

"We all have got to eat," he said.



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# BUSINESS



photo link: [Marcia Reed](#)

# STATE PROGRAMS LIKE EDGE HELP WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES GROW

investment on a 3-to-1 basis. Businesses that are less than seven years old and employ less than 10 people are eligible to apply. Five STEM-based companies receive up to \$100,000 for eligible expenses in each cycle while five Entrepreneur Class (non-STEM) businesses receive up to \$50,000. This month, the program awarded hundreds of thousands in grants.

Droneversity is using its 2023 \$50,000 grant to find an indoor training facility. “There are few available and affordable buildings in and around Wilmington with ceilings high enough for drones to fly safely indoors,” Cooper says. “Weather and temporary flight restrictions caused by how often President Biden is in Delaware often make outdoor flying problematic for teaching purposes.”

The pandemic led Brianna Westover and her husband to open **Studio B** in Milford, a print shop, gallery and creative coworking space. She didn’t love her job selling cars, and she kept thinking about a honeymoon trip to Seattle that included a visit to a small-town print shop where the couple fell in love with the idea of a print shop with other bells and whistles. Westover and husband Ben Kepler used their nearly \$50,000 EDGE grant to open Studio B in the former Delaware Eye Center, which had examination rooms the couple converted into rentable studio space.

“We’re developing our creative studio spaces; building a schedule of classes; collaborating with local artists to expand our consignment gallery; offering a selection of high-quality art supplies and stationery; and expanding our in-house printing capabilities,” Westover says.

Beyond the EDGE competition, Delaware offers a range of other services aimed at helping new small businesses build a stronger foundation for success. Recent winners praise business managers from the Delaware Division of Small Business who provide mentoring services through the EDGE application and pitch process and in other areas.

see page 12



BY PETER OSBORNE

When Ashlee Cooper was offered the opportunity to return to the teaching job she lost during the pandemic, she declined because her toddler’s school hadn’t reopened yet. She opted instead to open an event-planning company.

Her “ah-ha” moment came when someone saw her standing on a chair to photograph a balloon sculpture and suggested she use a drone instead. Cooper found an online course and became an FAA-certified drone pilot. That led to her opening **Droneversity** in April 2021 to prepare students who want to make money flying drones pass the FAA test.

## Women-owned winners

Cooper is one of 40 women-owned businesses to win an **EDGE grant** from the Delaware Division of Small Business since they began in spring 2019, including five of 10 awarded in the most recent cycle **announced** in early February. Through the EDGE grant, the Delaware Division of Small Business matches a winning business’s

Another source of support for small businesses, including many of the EDGE recipients is the **Delaware Office of Supplier Diversity** (OSD), which helps businesses become certified as a diverse supplier (women, minority, veteran, service disabled veteran and individuals with disabilities owned businesses) or a Small Business Focus (SBF) program vendor. The diversity office's directory of certified businesses is the primary tool used by state and local governments and other procurement offices for contracting purposes.

OSD has seen an increase in the number of women-owned businesses receiving the three-year certification that helps them win state contracts, including 139 new certifications in the current fiscal year and 243 if you include recertifications. Many have taken the office's training programs and workshops.

"The pandemic opened up a lot of funding opportunities and we're seeing women start more businesses," said OSD Director Shavonne White, who took over the role shortly before the start of the pandemic and sees certification as a "free marketing tool for businesses. When it comes to completing the application process for certification, women have it together."

In the bigger picture, Wells Fargo reported in January 2023 women-owned businesses growth rate nationally from 2019 to 2023 nearly doubled the pace of men. During the pandemic, women-owned businesses added 1.4 million jobs and \$579.6 billion in revenue to the economy.

Projections can be extremely difficult, but tools and training helped Chevonne Boyd, who founded **The Hive on Loockerman**, understand how to project where her business could go. The Hive is a member-based business and event center for entrepreneurs and non-profits. Boyd is using her nearly \$35,000 grant for façade improvement and construction to meet code requirements and for design, technology and equipment upgrades.

"I am beyond grateful to live in a state that pours such a significant amount of resources into the small business sector," Boyd said.



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# GOVERNMENT & POLITICS



photo link: Marcia Reed



## BILLBOARD MOCKS MILFORD MAYOR, COUNCIL AS WANTED FOR THEFT

BY KATIE KAZIMIR

“WANTED – MILFORD CITY COUNCIL – ATTEMPTED THEFT” says a billboard featuring photos of Milford’s mayor and seven council members that went up Friday on Del. 113 at the south end of town. It’s the most recent reaction to the council condemning eight acres belonging to Annette Billings and then using eminent domain to take her property for \$20,000.

That’s the “theft” referred to by the billboard. The city wants to use it to complete a park so it can put in a bike and walking trail to connect its four wards. Billings previously had the property, appraised and valued at about \$50,000 an acre.

“Sounds like a steal,” wrote James Weller on a Facebook post picturing the billboard. Weller said Billings was an easy target because she is a widow and cancer

survivor of a certain age and limited income. She raises chickens for a poultry company.

The billboard directs those wishing to share thoughts on the matter to call City Manager Mark Whitfield at 302-422-6166, ext. 1304.

“I think the people are exercising their first amendment right of free speech regarding government overreach,” said Billings’ lawyer, Ronald Poliquin.

Poliquin said he is amazed at how far interest in the eminent domain case has spread and he doesn’t foresee a stop to the public taking issue with Milford council’s actions any time soon. “There’s going to be consequences for their actions,” he said.

The court order sent to Billings by the city demanded she be in court Feb. 13. Poliquin said he filed for a con-

tinuance asking for time to give the case due diligence, but he expects that request to be denied. One reason for that, he said, is because city officials are upset about the public outcry against them. The action comes as the city is getting ready for an April 27 election.

“People, remember these faces on Election Day,” said Weller on his Facebook post. “They are the ones responsible for the taking of Annette Billings land by eminent domain.”

Not featured on the billboard was Todd Culotta, the only council member to vote against taking Billings property. The council discussed the move in executive session and then came back into public session to vote.

see page 16

from page 15

Culotta, who is running for mayor against incumbent Archie Campbell, said the other council members are starting to feel the heat and they have no one to blame but themselves. "This is a big mistake on their part," he said.

Two of the four council seats up for elections are known to have candidates running against current council members. Phillip Ruiz has filed for 4th Ward and will run against Katrina Wilson, who has been on council for 30 years. Diamanto Medula Kalesis filed against 1st Ward Councilman Michael Boyle. So far running uncontested are Andrew P. Fulton of the 2nd Ward and Brian C. Baer of the 3rd Ward. The deadline for nominees to file for candidacy is Feb. 27.

"Wow. There seems to be a large interest in this situation," said Dave Bell on The Lincoln City, Delaware page he runs on Facebook. "The people are speaking out."

Facebook user Linda Webb said she has been following the case and it's made her angry. "A bunch of thieving scoundrels in my book," she commented under Bell's post.

Both Webb and Bell raised questions as to the location of Billings' property. "Her property isn't even within town limits," Webb said.

That's what State Sen. Dave Wilson told the council in a hearing this week. Under the city charter, land close to Milford but not within its border can still be subject to eminent domain. Billings' property is close enough for the town to condemn and take under eminent domain.

see page 17

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“Annette can’t run for council nor can she vote since she doesn’t reside in town limits,” Weller said. “Yet they can take her land.”

Poliquin thinks a policy change is needed to remove that allowance from the charter. “I do think it’s an issue that people see, a government entity trying to take property outside its border,” Poliquin said.

**Billboard appearance**

According to Weller, the billboard is the work of Jamie Masten of **Masten Realty**, who could not be reached for comment. A red Masten Realty logo is affixed to the bottom right corner of the billboard structure and appears on a large “For Sale” sign on the property.

The billboard, which can be seen by traffic driving north on Del. 113, is located on the southbound side of the highway, just south of the Milford Redner’s. Poliquin said that it is “perfectly appropriate” for the people of Milford to exercise their first amendment right in such a big way. Culotta agreed, adding that at Monday’s council meeting he requested more time for public comments on the matter to be heard. Council denied his request, leaving only 15 minutes total for the more than 100 people attending to comment.

Poliquin’s advice to the mayor and council is simple. “Take the heat,” he said. “You’re elected officials. If you make a decision, stand by it.”

Campbell said he can’t comment on the billboard due to Milford being in litigation with Billings. Council members Mike Boyle and Dan Marabello were not

aware of the billboard until Milford Live approached them for comment. Both declined to comment and Marabello said council was advised by counsel to not to speak on the matter.

“How can you make this feel good?” Weller asked on his Facebook post. “What a sad day.” He suggested Milford adopt a code of conduct similar to that of Rotary clubs, which makes decisions based on truth, goodwill, friendship and the well-being of all involved. “Let’s just wait a minute. Let’s sit back and look,” Weller said.




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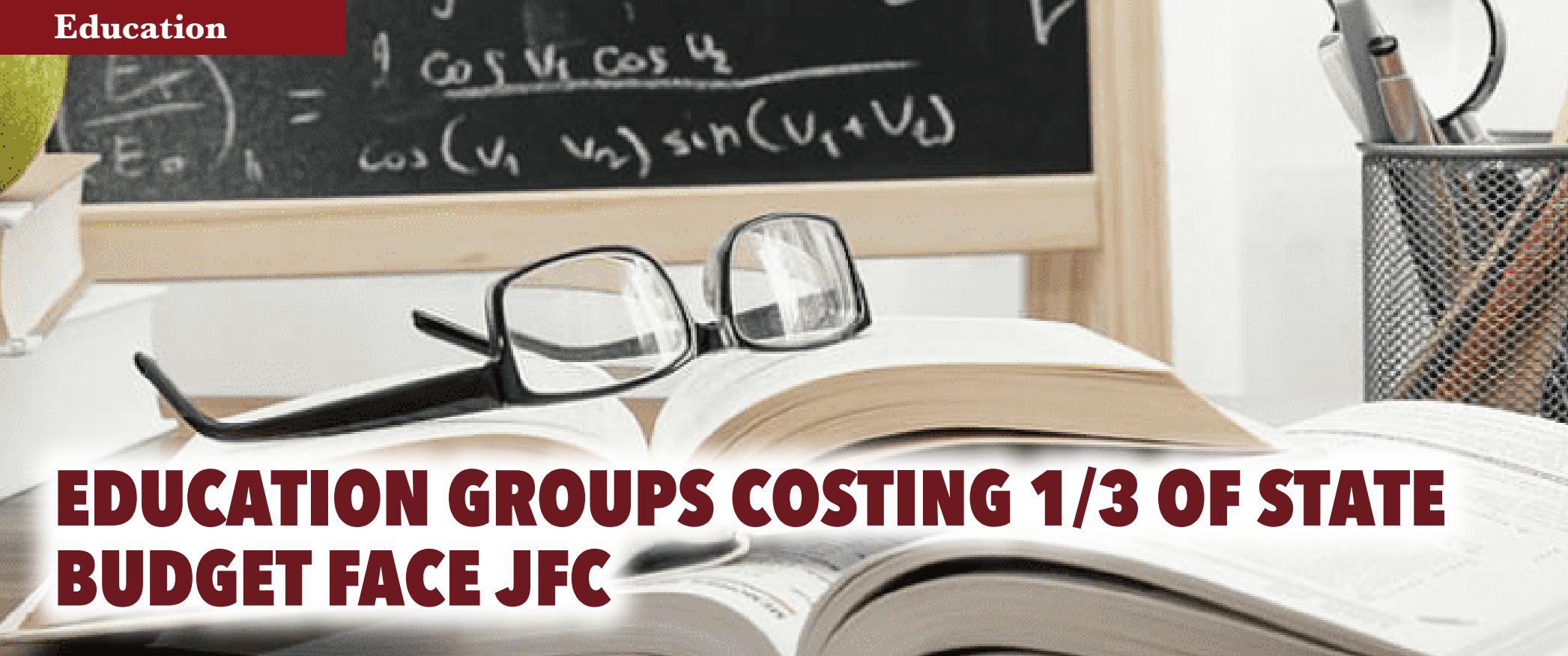
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# EDUCATION



photo link: [Milford School District](#)



# EDUCATION GROUPS COSTING 1/3 OF STATE BUDGET FACE JFC

BY JAREK RUTZ

Education — what one legislator called the most important investment by the state — consumed the Feb. 3 Joint Finance Committee hearing for a category that makes up about one-third of the state’s \$6 billion budget.

Appearing in the morning before the committee that decided how and where the state’s budget will be spent was The Redding Consortium and the Wilmington Learning Collaborative. Together, they asked for tens of millions of dollars to spend to improve education in Wilmington and New Castle County, specifically for at-risk and underserved students. After them, the state’s Department of Education requested more than \$2 billion.

## Department of Education

The Department of Education has \$2.1 billion penciled in under Gov. John Carney’s recommended budget

for Fiscal Year 2025, a 7.9% increase from this year. Education Secretary Mark Holodick started his presentation by stating that the state’s struggles with literacy are unacceptable. He and legislators have consistently said that it is crucial students learn to read by grade three. After that, it becomes much harder, and learning in school depends on students being able to read.

The department’s priorities for next year are literacy, early childhood education, recruitment and retention of educators, mental health and wellbeing, and school safety and security.

Holodick noted many schools have school resource officers and constables, as well as created secure vestibules at the entrance of buildings.

Legislators asked if there’s a curriculum requirement in early childhood education center. Some had heard of

see page 20

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centers that plop children in front of television screens and call it a day, comparing it to babysitting. Holodick said the department has curriculum recommendations, and using televisions as babysitters was certainly happening, but that in recent years that's been eclipsed by more advanced ways to teach the state's youngest learners.

In addressing literacy, he said more districts are hiring reading specialists, but they often bounce from school to school every couple of years, which creates challenges.

Several legislators said, and Holodick agreed, that the abundance of education legislation in recent years has put a burden on teachers and schools. Notably, teachers have required professional development to understand how to teach using the mandated science of reading, which relies on the science of how children learn. It has six essential components: phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, text comprehension and oral language.

Other legislation has required schools to hire more mental health specialists, schools to incorporate a Black history curriculum, developmental screenings for young learners and more. It can be a lot to deal with, Holodick said.

### Redding Consortium

The Redding Consortium for Educational Equity is seeking \$10.2 million in fiscal year 2025, which is included in Carney's recommended budget. The consortium, created in 2019, recommends policies and practices to the state to achieve educational equity and improve educational outcomes for all pre-K through

twelfth grade students in the city of Wilmington and northern New Castle County.

The lionshare of the funding would go to wraparound services and state-funded full-day pre-K. Wraparound services include before and after-school programs, summer programs and in-school wellness centers, which typically involve a partnership with local health care agencies to provide immediate mental or physical care for students.

The consortium has about \$2 million in carry-over funds from last year, which it plans to use on created an equity data dashboard the public can use to see racial-equity data involving city students and educators. It also will be used for the Boost 22-26 initiative, a cross-district effort focused on improving graduation rates for high school students in Wilmington through tailored academic support from graduation coaches.

Matt Denn and Sen. Elizabeth "Tizzy" Lockman, D-Wilmington — the two co-chairs of the consortium — also touted the group's whole school professional development program. It's a teacher-leader program for educators in schools with large concentrations of students in poverty. Rep. Kim Williams, D-Marshallton, a JFC member and head of the House Education Committee, requested data on whether those teachers stay in the schools since teacher retention has been a national problem.

"I think it's important to see because for us as a body, and spending money, we need to make sure that these programs are working where we have these educators that are staying in these schools," she said.

see page 21

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from page 20

Williams also said it's important to track students' progress from early years onward, since many of them do not start at the same level.

Sen. Laura Sturgeon, a JFC member and chair of the Senate Education Committee, asked how the consortium would define success.

"There's a lot of definitions out there that people throw around, like test scores... but there are other forms of success and given the amount of state dollars going into this I'm curious what you would consider success," she said. "I'm very open to outside the box thinking because I'm not overly committed to the idea that the only true measure of success is a number on a test score."

Lockman said test scores are a data point the consortium tracks and values, as well as how the consortium's ongoing projects are going. She also said climate indicators help measure success.

"The retention of educators, but also the attendance of students is obviously a big one," she said. "Just indicators that people want to be there, that they are thriving in that space in ways other than just how they're performing on a test." Sturgeon said if a student can go on to become a contributing member of society, whether their test scores are exemplary or not, it's a true sign of success.

Denn added that schools receiving wraparound service grants are required to track objective outcomes, and also family involvement. Sturgeon suggested that one day, the whole state could use the services of the consortium.

see page 22

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from page 21

Sen. Eric Buckson, R-Dover, a member of the JFC and the Senate Education Committee, recommended that there be a conversation about the facilities the children are in and a better mechanism for improving those facilities. He pointed out that many districts must have taxpayer referendums to raise funds to improve buildings. Sen. Dave Lawson, R-Marydel, expressed frustration that there's so much money going to services that only benefit a handful of schools in the state.

### Wilmington Learning Collaborative

The **Wilmington Learning Collaborative** is made up of nine city of Wilmington schools across the Brandywine, Christina and Red Clay school districts. It serves about 3,000 students, and hopes to give families and educators a voice in policy-making to help improve both academic and societal outcomes for those students.

Wrapping up its second planning year, its executive director Laura Burgos presented a budget of more than \$16 million to the Joint Finance Committee. Burgos said the initial school reports from all nine schools should be received by the end of February. It will contain data on the current state of the school, as well as needs and potential programs to improve and more.

The collaborative has similar goals to the Redding Consortium and the two have been working together to align their programming, which the committee members repeatedly said is crucial. One of their common initiatives is professional development, and Burgos said it's vital that teachers stay in schools with vulnerable students.

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# HEALTH



photo link: Bayhealth



# BAYHEALTH TO BUILD EMPLOYEE-ONLY CHILDCARE CENTER IN MILFORD

BY TERRY ROGERS

Bayhealth will build a new childcare center on its **Sussex County Campus** to help staff members working 12-hour shifts. The new center will be a standalone facility with completion scheduled for 2025. The hospital company has a Dover center doing the same for its employees. The Milford center will be able to take up to 102 children when it opens and could expand to 204 if demand grows.

“We’re really excited about this offering,” said Darlene Stone, chief human resource officer. “What it offers that’s unique is the ability to be open from 6 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Oftentimes daycare centers are closed before our shift workers get off and are not open before they have to come in to work.”

The hospital’s move comes as state and business leaders talk about the need for more childcare, to enable more people to go to work. The state plans raise the amount of subsidies it gives to low-wage earners so people can

work. Sussex County, in particular, is a focus of concern because there are proportionately fewer centers and slots for children, and they often cost more than in Kent or New Castle County.

Overall in Delaware, about 48% of workers have children who need care during the day, a recent study said.

## Bayhealth accreditation

Bayhealth’s new building will be accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, so it will be a full education facility for children who are attending the daycare.

Stone said the Dover center has been open for several years and has been popular. One Sussex Campus employee drives their child to Dover for childcare. The centers will only accommodate staff, Stone said.

“In Dover, we have about 47 children on a waiting list just with staff,” she said. “We did open the one in Dover to the public, but the need by our staff was so great, we



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had to close it to staff only. If we ever get to the point we can open it to the public, we will, but right now we know how much our staff needs this service.”

As the building nears completion, Bayhealth will be hiring staff. Stone plugged the advantages of being able to work there.

“The beauty of being employed by Bayhealth in the childcare center is that you get all the benefits offered by Bayhealth,” Stone said. “We pay a generous hourly wage, but they also get health insurance, retirement plans and tuition reimbursement that other childcare centers are not able to offer.”

Bayhealth is accepting sponsorships for the childcare center, some of which include naming opportunities. To learn more, go to Bayhealth [website](#).





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