

# DelTech seeks tax to pay for school improvements

By Rachel Kipp, The News Journal

Posted Wednesday, November 29, 2006 at 8:34 pm

DOVER -- As enrollment at Delaware Technical & Community College approaches capacity, school officials are asking the state to approve a property tax to pay for new classrooms.

“We’re at 96 percent capacity for our credit programs; this is an issue beyond our ability to solve on our own,” DelTech President Orlando George state officials while making his requests today for the 2008 budget year. “I’m not worried about the next 300 students to walk in the door. But what about the next 3,000?”

DelTech has more than 40,000 students enrolled in credit and noncredit programs. That number is expected to rise almost 30 percent by 2020, fueled by the state’s new Student Excellence Equals Degree scholarship program and a changing economy that increasingly expects a college education of workers, George said.

To avoid having to choose which students it will admit, DelTech needs to construct new buildings and renovate existing structures, George said.

But limited money from the state means more than \$38 million in improvements have been delayed already and, despite being in its seventh year of funding, a project like a new health science building on the Stanton campus has only one-third of the money it needs.

Using property tax revenue to fund operational costs and capital improvements at community colleges is a common practice in many states, said Bruce Vandal, director of post-secondary education and workforce development for the Education Commission of the States. The nonprofit group shares information between state policymakers and education leaders.

Paying for additional classroom space is a challenge for community colleges across the country, Vandal said.

“Community colleges are feeling the pinch because in general they are funded at lower levels than other post-secondary institutions and they are serving what they would say are students who require a much higher investment because they come in oftentimes without the skill needed to survive in higher education,” he said.

Following a May capital budget hearing when George detailed the infrastructure problems at DelTech, the state's General Assembly authorized a review of the current funding structure. George said the option that will best meet the college's needs is a community college infrastructure fund.

Revenues for the fund, which would be controlled by DelTech's board of trustees, would be generated by a property tax collected using the existing administrative structure for school districts. Existing exemptions would be maintained, George said.

The rates George proposed were based on the average market value of a home in Delaware, which he said was \$174,400. A homeowner in that bracket would pay increasing amounts starting at \$16 in the fund's first year and rising to a \$50 cap after 10 years.

The structure would let DelTech collect almost \$7.5 million after the first year, George said.

"It's a local tax supporting local people for local jobs," said George, adding that money from the program would go toward completing the health science building in Stanton and constructing similar facilities on DelTech's Kent and Sussex County campuses. "That's how people feel like they can justify it to their constituents."

George said the key to implementing the tax would be convincing Delawareans that such a plan is worth their money. But some legislators also expressed reservations over the initial proposal.

"I'm a strong supporter of DelTech and its mission and a strong supporter of Dr. George and his management and leadership of the organization but I'd like to know more," said state Senate Majority Leader Harris B. McDowell III, D-Wilmington North. "This is really out of the blue to me. I don't want to reject anything out-of-hand but I hope we could find other ways of starting down that road outside of a statewide property tax."

"I think that tuition needs to cover the costs of running the colleges," said state Sen. Karen Peterson, D-Stanton. "I don't think there should be a special property tax."

Contact Rachel Kipp at 324-2386 or rkipp@delawareonline.com.

---

**Copyright ©2007, The News Journal.** Use of this site signifies your agreement to the [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#) (updated 10/3/2005) Use of this site signifies your agreement to the [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#) (updated 10/3/2005)