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Biden to teachers: Change the system
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REHOBOTH BEACH -- Vice President Joe Biden asked 150 Delaware teachers Friday evening for help in transforming the nation's public education system.

"I genuinely need your help to make this work because, folks, look at it this way. We've been given all the ammunition. If we shoot and miss, if we squander the opportunity, tell me how long you think it's going to take for another American president to go and ask for more dollars to correct the education system," Biden said to the Delaware State Education Association members at the Atlantic Sands Hotel & Conference Center in Rehoboth Beach.

Citing about \$105 billion that is coming to the U.S. Department of Education from the federal stimulus package, Biden said teachers will finally have the means to improve education.

"You've got a president and vice president absolutely committed to having all the tools you need to finally get it right in American public education," Biden said at the DSEA's annual winter retreat.

Delaware will receive about \$211 million in additional education funding from the federal stimulus package, which will prevent teacher layoffs, larger class sizes and eliminated programs, said Sen. Ted Kaufman, D-Del., the former Biden aide appointed by former Gov. Ruth Ann Minner to fill Biden's seat. Kaufman also addressed the group.

Biden thanked the DSEA -- the state's school employee union -- for their campaign contributions and volunteer work in last fall's election.

"I'm standing here with this [vice president] seal in front of me because of you, and I appreciate it," he said. "It's good to be home with so many friends."

DSEA President Diane Donohue said Biden, President Barack Obama and Gov. Jack Markell are the kind of leaders needed to bring about change in Delaware.

"And we need that change now," she said.

Biden said protecting education was a priority for him and Obama because children are punished when cuts are made to education budgets.

"If teachers are laid off, it means increased class size. It means programs get canceled," he said.

Obama's administration will be expecting a lot out of today's students, Biden said.

Dropping out will no longer be an option, and receiving more than a high school diploma will be essential, as Obama expects to have the highest percentage of college graduates in the world by 2020.

Education will be a key factor in the nation's economy recovery, the vice president said.

"The measure of the success of our administration will be measured by progress of the middle class. And the key to the progress of the middle class is education," he said.

Biden's wife, Jill, a former DSEA member when she taught in the Brandywine School District, said fixing the education system is a huge challenge but also carries great rewards.

"And it's people like you that can and will make it a reality," said Jill Biden, who taught English at Delaware Technical & Community College until her husband was inaugurated.

Today, she teaches at Northern Virginia Community College.

The challenge for Delaware's teachers is now, said the vice president.

"The good news is, we have the resources. The bad news is that everyone is watching so we better do this right. Our children and grandchildren are watching and they need us to act now," Biden said.