A first-year report on Delaware’s commitment to improve its public schools, on the anniversary of winning Race to the Top
One year after the state's first-place win in the federal Race to the Top grant competition, Delaware remains a national leader in education reform, with $119 million in new federal money to spend on schools and a responsibility to meaningfully change public education for our children.

The state has taken important first steps in what will be a four-year process. In its foundational planning year, Delaware educators and leaders focused on identifying systems that weren’t working and redesigning them to make student learning the top priority.

This update explains our progress so far, the work still needed to meet Delaware’s Race to the Top commitments, and other steps we feel are necessary to truly elevate public education. The need is more urgent than ever:

On the 2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which measures students in 34 developed countries, U.S. students ranked 14th in reading, 17th in science, and 25th in math. Regaining our global competitiveness begins by transforming learning, classroom by classroom. We intend to track the state’s progress every year in accomplishing this work.

Real reform takes time. The work is hard, and the road is long. But we must do this right — for the sake of Delaware’s children.

“This race is a marathon, not a sprint ... complex and challenging, requiring levels of collaboration rarely experienced in public education reform.”

Delaware Governor Jack Markell

This report was produced by Vision 2015, a coalition of education, government, business, and community leaders committed to creating the best schools in the world for every Delaware student — no exceptions, no excuses. Vision 2015’s priorities align directly with Race to the Top’s core goals. This document reports on these shared goals, along with two other issues — early childhood education and school funding — which we deem essential to excellent public education.

The apple: the iconic image of education for generations of American students. We use it in this report to symbolize the enduring values of the U.S. education system and also as an indicator of progress. The fuller the apple, the closer we have come to fulfilling our commitments.
Set high standards for college and career readiness, and measure progress with quality assessments and excellent data systems.

Why? Because only 35 percent of Delaware’s students are proficient in reading and math, according to the internationally benchmarked National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) standards.

What’s Been Done: Delaware Has …

✓ Adopted the internationally competitive Common Core Standards to better prepare Delaware’s students for real-world demands, and began training teachers in these higher standards.

✓ Launched the Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System (DCAS) to better measure student progress and provide timely information to 9,000 teachers, parents, and students.

✓ Offered the SAT for free to all 11th-grade public school students, whether college or career bound.

The Work Ahead: Delaware Must …

☐ Continue phasing in the Common Core Standards and associated curriculum, assessments, and teacher supports to reach 2014 goals.

☐ Increase preschool-to-college coordination and tracking by sharing student data among state agencies and higher education institutions.

☐ Develop a statewide education dashboard with information on pre-K programs, schools, and higher education institutions to help families make informed choices.

☐ Provide meaningful additional time for academics, enrichment, and teacher collaboration and planning.*

☐ Provide online learning opportunities with challenging coursework that allow students to work at their own pace.*

Accelerate improvement in Delaware’s highest-need schools to help the children who need it most.

Why? Because of the 192 Delaware public schools evaluated by the state in 2010, 24 were deemed persistently low performing.

What’s Been Done: Delaware Has …

✓ Established the Partnership Zone to focus resources and best practices on Delaware’s persistently lowest-achieving schools, with the goal of improving student achievement within two years.

✓ Approved the first four Partnership Zone schools to implement turnaround plans around changes such as expanded learning time, family and community engagement, performance-based pay for teachers, and merit-driven teacher recruitment.

✓ Provided support to low-performing schools to attract and retain highly effective educators to teach hard-to-staff subjects.

The Work Ahead: Delaware Must …

☐ Expand the Partnership Zone school turnaround model to 10 schools in two years; implement each school plan; and clarify consequences for schools that do not improve performance by the deadline.

☐ Expand access to nationally recognized teacher and leader preparation programs to recruit outstanding candidates.

☐ Share lessons learned from the first four Partnership Zone schools with all struggling schools.

☐ Create a policy environment that encourages growth or replication of high-performing charter and district school models to help students in chronically low-performing schools.

*Additional Vision 2015 recommendation
Recruit, support, retain, and reward great teachers and leaders who can help all students meet high standards.

Why? Because teacher quality is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement.

What’s Been Done: Delaware Has …

✔ Passed new regulations linking teacher effectiveness, as measured by the Delaware Performance Appraisal System (DPAS II), to student growth, requiring teachers to be deemed effective before earning tenure-like protections.

✔ Trained educators in the Vision Network’s 26 schools to improve school leadership and accelerate student achievement.

✔ Worked toward establishing the Delaware Leadership Project (DLP) and established the Delaware Teaching Fellows (DTF) program to prepare talented leaders and attract and retain highly effective teachers to work in high-need schools.

✔ Expanded alternative certification paths for teachers of hard-to-staff subjects such as math in high-need schools.

✔ Recruited and trained new science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) teachers for placement in critical-need subject areas in traditionally hard-to-staff schools.

✔ Enlisted more than 300 educators to help develop student growth measures in 30 content areas.

✔ Instituted a professional development program to help districts implement Race to the Top goals.

The Work Ahead: Delaware Must …

☐ Define reliable, comparable measures of student achievement to use in teacher evaluations, starting in 2011–12.

☐ Use these evaluations to make decisions on teachers’ professional development, promotion, retention, and removal.

☐ Fully roll out the Development and Data Coach programs in schools to support fair teacher evaluations and help teachers use student performance data to improve instruction.

☐ Adopt policies to amend the state’s approved alternative routes to certification to include nationally proven teacher preparation programs.

☐ Hire teachers earlier to ensure a competitive applicant pool.*

☐ Fully roll out DLP and DTF and begin placing talented, effective teachers and leaders in high-need schools.

☐ Give principals more hiring and budgeting freedom.*

☐ Require greater accountability from teacher college programs for graduates’ performance.

“This state is going to take education to an entirely different level.”

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

*Additional Vision 2015 recommendation
Invest in early childhood education to help young children from underserved communities get a strong start in school.

Why? Because only 34 percent of Delaware children begin kindergarten at grade level.

What’s Been Done: Delaware Has …

- **Improved the quality of early childhood education** in more than 184 programs serving more than 10,500 children statewide through the Delaware Stars for Early Success program.*
- **Released a pilot study on kindergarten readiness**, finding that while 80 percent of children attend preschool, just 34 percent leave prepared for kindergarten.*
- **Provided early childhood professionals funds** to obtain AA and BA degrees through the TEACH scholarship program.*
- **Presented early education reform recommendations** to the governor and general assembly, and analyzed school funding sources.*

The Work Ahead: Delaware Must …

- Expand state support for **quality early childhood education**, especially for children from low-income families.*
- **Enhance professional development** for early childhood educators.*
- Enable data systems to **share students’ information** from “cradle to career” to track progress and tailor instruction and investments accordingly.
- Improve and implement a **statewide kindergarten-readiness assessment**.*
- **Strengthen coordination** among child services agencies, early childhood providers, and schools.*

Establish a simple and equitable funding system to more effectively spend taxpayers’ education dollars.

Why? Because Delaware’s inflexible, 60-year-old education funding system does not meet the actual needs of all public school students.

What’s Been Done: Delaware Has …

- **Enacted only a small fraction** of the $158 million in cost efficiency recommendations made by the governor-appointed Leadership for Education Achievement in Delaware (LEAD) Committee in 2008.*
- **Posted district-level financial reports online**, providing information about per-pupil costs and expenses by category.*

The Work Ahead: Delaware Must …

- **Remedy additional budget inefficiencies** as recommended by the LEAD Committee, and redirect those savings to the classroom.*
- **Implement a voluntary program** to give districts and school leaders **flexibility to use funds** to best meet students’ needs.*
- Create a “**weighted student funding**” formula so schools serving English language learners, students with disabilities, and other high-need populations have the resources they need.*
- Report more education financials online to **increase transparency**.*

*Additional Vision 2015 recommendation
We still have far to go to meet our Race to the Top and Vision 2015 commitments:

**Meeting State Standards**
2009/2010 Delaware Student Testing Program average (grades 3, 5, 8, 10) and 2014 performance goals under the new Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System

- **Reading Proficiency**
  - 2009: 75%
  - 2014 Goal: 100%
- **Math Proficiency**
  - 2009: 70%
  - 2014 Goal: 100%

**Meeting National Standards**
Delaware students’ performance according to internationally benchmarked National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) standards

- **4th-Grade Reading Proficiency**
  - 2009: 35%
  - 2014 Goal: 55%
- **4th-Grade Math Proficiency**
  - 2009: 36%
  - 2014 Goal: 60%
- **8th-Grade Reading Proficiency**
  - 2009: 31%
  - 2014 Goal: 55%
- **8th-Grade Math Proficiency**
  - 2009: 32%
  - 2014 Goal: 55%

**Delaware Students Graduating High School**
- 2009: 82%
- 2014 Goal: 92%

**Delaware Students Enrolling in College**
- 2008: 50%
- 2014 Goal: 70%

**Closing Delaware’s Achievement Gap**
- Disparity between minority and white students’ average NAEP scores
- 2009: 27%
- 2015 Goal: 13.5%

**Using Race to the Top Funds: Year 1 of 4**
- 2010 awarded: $119 million
- First year spent: $15.4 million

We will continue to report progress toward these goals during the coming years, and we invite you to join us in this campaign to create outstanding Delaware schools.

Here’s how to stay up-to-date:

- Request our twice-monthly e-newsletter: www.vision2015delaware.org
- Get Race to the Top updates at: www.doe.k12.de.us
- Attend your local school board meetings
  (visit your school district website)
- Contact your local legislators:
  http://legis.delaware.gov

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