

Vision 2015

Transforming Delaware's Education System

A CLOSER LOOK AT KEY CHALLENGES

Vision 2015 is a private/public/civic effort dedicated to developing a world-class public education system in Delaware. We intend to be the first state in the country to develop a truly innovative, world-class education system for every student in every school — not just pockets of excellence here and there. In so doing, Delaware has a golden opportunity to serve as an example to the rest of the United States and the rest of the world.

In our increasingly competitive world, each and every one of our students needs to be fully prepared for higher education, the workplace, and responsible citizenship. As other states and nations gain academic and intellectual ground, we must transform our public education system to remain competitive and ensure the well-being of Delaware citizens. Our education system needs to be strong enough to attract new employers and families.

To build public understanding about the magnitude of the challenge and opportunity, the Vision 2015 Steering Committee plans to publish several issue briefs in the coming weeks. This second issue brief summarizes the group's preliminary diagnosis of the system, based on a review of data, policies, and procedures; as well as numerous interviews and discussions with Delaware students, parents, and educators. This diagnostic is not intended to cover all possible topics in education. Rather, the intent is to rapidly build a common current-state understanding in key areas. *The analysis may seem more heavily weighted toward shortcomings and challenges. This should not be taken as an overall judgment of today's education system; there are many examples of achievement and improvement. Rather, the goal of the diagnostic is to bring focus to the areas of greatest opportunity and to make clear the need and mandate for change.*

Are all students being challenged and supported?

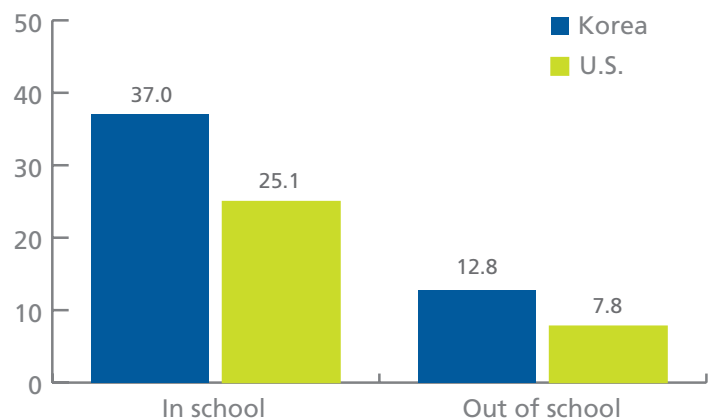
Delaware's public education offerings are not consistently rigorous.

Recent and current high school students report that they want to be held to high standards and provided with support to meet those standards, that they want to better understand the relevance of class work to the "real world," and that they desire a personal connection with their educators. However, Delaware's current system does not consistently meet those expectations.

The reasons for this are multifaceted. In some cases, students say their curriculum and coursework are not challenging. Delaware's statewide curriculum standards receive mixed reviews; and students, parents, and educators alike question whether schools effectively utilize and provide enough instructional time. In some cases, discipline issues disrupt classrooms, while in other

U.S. Students Spend Comparatively Little Time on Academics

Hours per week spent on academics



The average Korean student spends about 600 more hours per year on academics than the average American student

Source: The Broad Foundation, OECD PISA Assessment

cases, teachers are under-supported or under-prepared to effectively tailor instruction to individual student needs.

Several Delaware public high school alumni reported that their “college prep”-level classes were too easy and did not prepare them for college. In fact, Delaware lags the nation in “college readiness” (measured in part by high school course requirements); only 32 percent of graduating students are considered “college-ready” and more than 60 percent of Delaware public school graduates who attend Del Tech must take remedial courses their freshman year. In the case of AP offerings (generally accepted to be a strong predictor of college performance), Delaware ranks 10th in the country on AP exam participation but only 26th on exam performance, indicating that instruction does not adequately prepare students for the tests. Furthermore, wide variation in annual participation rates among student segments (7 percent of white students versus 2 percent of African American students) both reflects and reinforces the state’s achievement gap.

Students: Low Expectations

“Teachers expect some kids to fail based on their appearance or how they act. These kids are treated differently ... nothing’s really expected of them.”

— High school student

“If students [better understand that] it is hard to get a good job, it will encourage kids to work harder in school. Everyone wants a good life.”

— High school student

“Keeping us out of school doesn’t work. Isolation doesn’t work. A connection with human beings is important.”

— Alternative high school student

“She won’t answer me because everyone else is talking. Why take that experience from me when I’m paying attention and just trying to learn?”

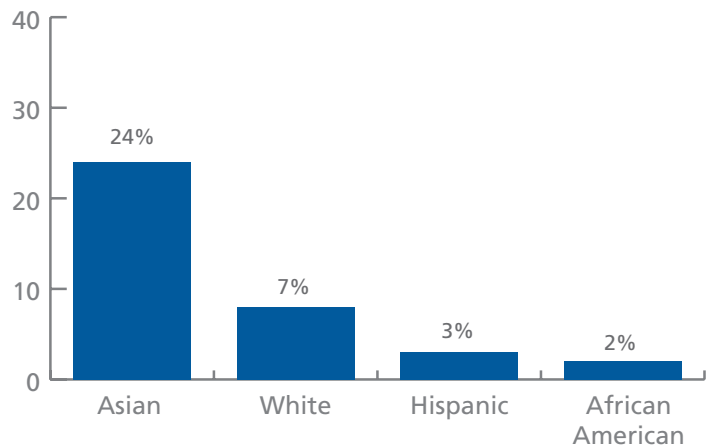
— Student

“I was not the best student academically in high school — if you didn’t get A’s or B’s you were kind of put to the side. They need to pay more attention to the students who aren’t doing as well. It would just start a cycle where I didn’t do well, they didn’t push me, so I’d continue to do badly.”

— Graduate, current college student

Wide Variation in Student AP Participation that Reflects and Reinforces Achievement Gaps

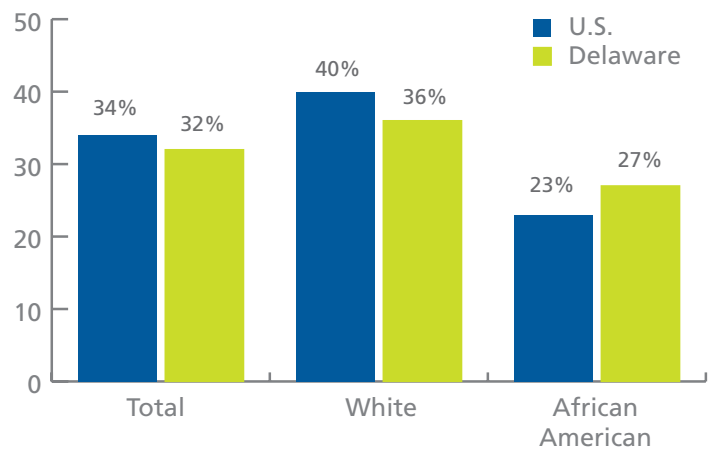
Percentage of students taking at least one AP exam, 2004



Source: The College Board

Delaware Lags Nation in College Preparedness Ranks 32nd in “College Readiness”

Percentage of students leaving high school “college-ready,” 2002



Source: Greene and Winters, Center for Civic Innovation, “Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates: 1991–2002,” 2005.

We are not doing enough to help low performers and at-risk students catch up.

Ideally, at-risk students should be identified and provided with targeted assistance to catch up as early as possible; however, it appears that Delaware does not yet have processes in place to systematically do so. DSTP performance analyses show that those students who score below standard in 3rd grade only have a 25 percent chance in math and a 40 percent chance in reading of reaching standard by 10th grade. In addition, students scoring below standard on 8th grade DSTP exams have more than a 40 percent chance of failing to graduate from high school.

Beyond academic performance, students drop out for many other reasons, from pregnancy and family needs to general disinterest in school or perceived irrelevance of obtaining a diploma. Delaware's current intervention strategies do not seem adequate or coherent to students who are at a higher risk of dropping out.

Students: Dropping Out

"I had to get out ... I felt like the school was against me ... I had a security guard who would walk me to classes."

"I got pregnant, and then just really didn't want to be there."

"Guidance counselors would help you with college, but they weren't going to help me get a job. Why stay?"

"I didn't dislike it, but I needed a job."

"It started with a fight. I got suspended and just gave up."

— Dropouts and current adult students in Delaware

More children need early childhood education and social/emotional learning support.

Studies show that attending preschool enhances children's readiness for kindergarten and correlates positively with long-term measures of educational success, such as high school graduation and college attendance. However, while Delaware's subsidized pre-K programs serve more than 95 percent of 4 year olds in poverty, the state has no formal program for impoverished children under 4, and there is limited pre-K participation within the broader population (only 44 percent of children between ages 3 and 4 are enrolled in nursery school or preschool). In addition, statistics point to the need for enhanced social and emotional support for

Delaware students. Within the last year, 16 percent of male high school students were involved in a physical fight on school property; 28 percent of high school students were offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property; and 13 percent of high school students made suicide plans. Additionally, within the last month, 26 percent of high school students reported having five or more alcoholic drinks in a row.

Students Need Social/Emotional Support

Nationally, in the past year:

Male school children who fought on school property



Made suicide plans



Offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property



Nationally, in the past month:

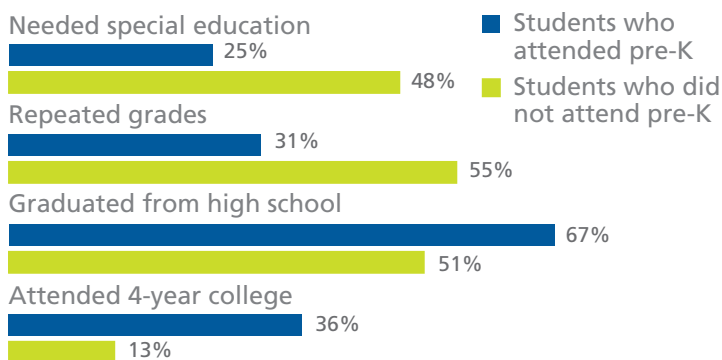
Had five or more alcoholic drinks in a row



Source: CASEL presentation August 20, 2005, "Getting to Heart of School Reform," CDC Survey (2003)

Pre-K Provides Long-Term Advantages

Abecedarian project academic results: Early Childhood Intervention Project



Source: NIEER, "The Effects of State Prekindergarten Programs on Young Children's School Readiness in Five States"; NIEER, "Benefits of Preschool for All"; Abecedarian project

Do we have enough great educators getting the right support?

Delaware is not attracting enough quality educators.

As baby boom teachers hit retirement, we will be challenged to attract quality educators to fill the resulting openings. Currently, not enough top Delaware students are pursuing teaching — prospective education majors have the 20th-highest average SAT scores (among 22 intended majors) of college-bound students in Delaware

(chart, next page). Teacher education programs are producing too few middle and high school teachers and too few teachers in specific areas such as math, science, and special education. While Delaware has an alternative certification program that might help fill these gaps, relatively few teachers are coming to Delaware's public schools from other professions (only about 60 of more than 900 new teachers in 2003).

Furthermore, Delaware is losing promising new educators to neighboring states. Due to a combination of structural constraints and administrative inefficiencies, Delaware districts often hire most of their teachers in late summer, after top prospects have accepted positions elsewhere. And while Delaware districts pay teachers well compared to other states (the 9th highest average starting salary), when accounting for Delaware's relatively higher salaries across all jobs, this advantage falls away (Delaware ranks only 35th nationally when measuring starting teacher salary as a percent of all starting salaries.)

Educators: Professional Development

"I think it's the teacher's obligation to share best practices. But you can't get them to everyone. There's not enough time."

— Teacher

"There's an alphabet soup of [professional development] programs: LOTI, CRISS, LFS, PLC, SREB, SAELP, NWEA ... but teachers really don't have to buy in to any of them. There's a 'this too shall pass' attitude."

— Teacher

"Often, professional development is an in-service and a big fat binder I'll never open again."

— Teacher

"I actually was in charge of [a specific program] for our district last year. We did follow up and found that only about 5 percent of the teachers were using what they learned."

— Teacher

"[A specific program] in our district is pretty good. I think more teachers [implement the program] than used to. The administrators are required to know the programs, so they are more able to follow up."

— Teacher

Educators: Mentoring

"The program is very thorough: joint tasks [with mentor], observation, interviews with teachers, personal reflection ..."

— Recent teacher mentee

"The mentoring program is good, but right now we can't get enough time away from our classroom [to observe others] to make it as helpful as it could be."

— Teacher

"The instructional coaches in my district have been very effective. We could use more of them."

— Principal

Delaware College-Bound Students Intending To Pursue Education Have 3rd Lowest SAT Scores

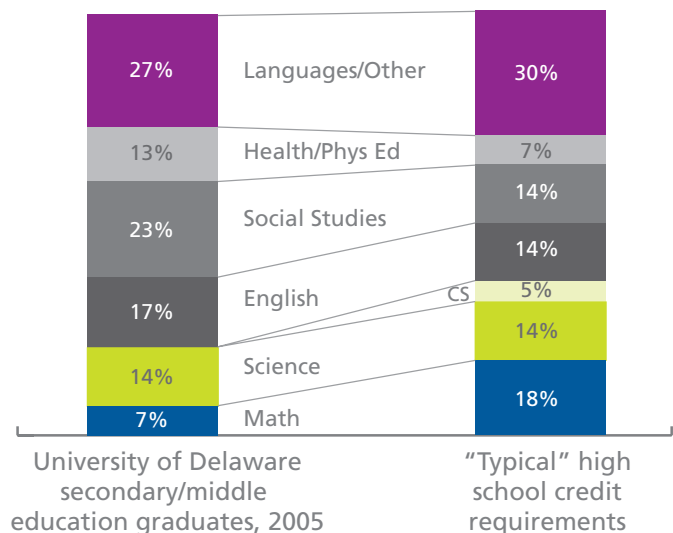
Combined reading/math SAT score of Delaware college-bound seniors by intended major, 2005

Philosophy/Religion/Theology	1139
Mathematics	1135
Language/Literature	1030
Biological Sciences	1098
Physical Sciences	1094
Engineering	1081
Foreign/Classical Language	1075
General/Interdisciplinary Studies	1045
Computer/Information Science	1041
Social Studies/History	1032
Architecture/Environmental Design	1031
Communications	1012
Military Sciences	1002
Visual and Performing Arts	998
Undecided	996
Agriculture/Natural Resources	973
Business and Commerce	968
Health and Allied Services	964
Home Economics	959
Education	948
Public Affairs and Services	902
Technical and Vocational	880

Source: "2005 College-bound Seniors SAT Scores" from College Board

Current Mismatch Between Subject Needs and Supply of New Teachers, Particularly in Math and Science ...

Teachers' majors versus typical high school course distribution, 2005



Source: University of Delaware New Teacher Survey; University of Delaware Teacher Supply; DEEDS; Department of "Education Statistics"; Caesar Rodney website

Professional development and support systems are not meeting all of educators' needs.

For educators to be successful, they too must receive effective development, training, and support. However, Delaware educators feel many of the processes designed to help them improve do not suitably fill that role. While certain initiatives, such as the statewide “clusters,” are gaining positive feedback from some, most teachers feel that formal professional development programs often lack continuity and ongoing implementation support and are not customized to meet their individual needs. Most see mentoring as more helpful, but Delaware’s current mentorship program garners mixed reviews. Some teachers applaud its thoroughness and incorporation of self-evaluation, while others feel the program has become overly structured and does not allow enough time for teachers to observe each other. Elsewhere, mentoring

Educators: Evaluation

“It’s formulaic. Under the current system, posting rules and consequences in the classroom has the same weight as ‘delivers content effectively.’”

— Principal

“The evaluation is a one-shot deal. We’d never do this with a kid!”

— Teacher

“My observations were done for the year in January. That’s nice, but I’d like to know if I improve in the second half of the year.”

— First-year teacher

“My colleagues in business get upset if they have more than seven people to evaluate. I have 40 to 50.”

— Principal

“In classes like mine, [the administrator evaluating] has no clue what someone is doing well He can tell kids aren’t throwing things, but beyond that it’s just pretty pictures on the board.”

— High school calculus teacher

and induction programs have proven to be critical tools in both developing and retaining new teachers.

Finally, both teachers and principals raise concerns about the current teacher evaluation process. The process puts a heavy burden on administrator time (due to the number of teachers each administrator must evaluate), and the relative infrequency with which individual teachers are observed calls accuracy into question. Further, some administrators use the system to document the weaknesses of only their lowest-performing teachers, while merely “checking the boxes” for others. This means that the process does not produce actionable improvement suggestions for most teachers.

Delaware’s principals lack support.

Principals believe that their most important role is to be an instructional leader. However, they find themselves spending so much of their time managing a “hodgepodge” of other activities — such as ineffective instructors, day-to-day building operations, and politics — that their ability to provide valuable leadership and guidance is often compromised. Recognizing the important function that principal effectiveness plays in school performance, many stakeholders feel that the role of principals should be re-evaluated.

Principals: A Hodgepodge of Responsibilities

“At the beginning of the day I have a list of 10 things to do. At the end of the day, I’ve done a ton but still haven’t gotten through number two.”

— Principal

“Sometimes I see my role as just running interference so all the rest of the staff can focus on instruction.”

— Principal

“I want to spend time on helping improve instruction, but in the end, I probably spend 1/10th of what I should.”

— Principal

Is the overall system organized to get results?

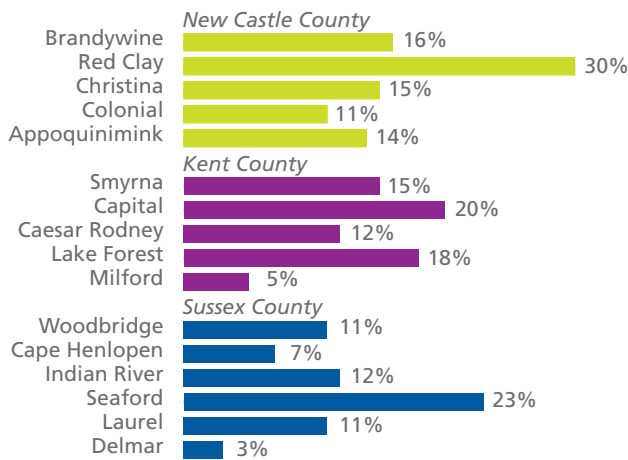
Delaware’s performance management systems, school “choice” options, community support networks, and governance structure face challenges.

Optimal performance management systems are characterized by clearly defined, high-quality measurements that are aligned with key objectives, focused on gains,

linked to development tools, and enforced through appropriate rewards and consequences. Stakeholders have suggested opportunities to continue refining and improving Delaware’s student (DSTP), teacher (DPAS), and school (DSTP/NCLB) assessment systems so that they set the standard across all those dimensions.

Limited Set of Options in Southern and Rural Delaware

Percentage of students attending choice or charter schools by district, 2004–05



Source: Delaware School Profiles

Despite the broad structure of Delaware’s current choice system (e.g., charter schools and schools with targeted career/vocational/content focuses), the practicalities of choice are limiting. Students in southern and rural areas have fewer options, and parents across the state feel their available options are not transparent or easy enough to navigate. Furthermore, Delaware does not currently have a comprehensive strategy to ensure that

Educators: Community Support

“It’s tough to bring a child along [academically] if they do not know if they will have dinner that night or even a place to go home to.”

— Educator

“When it comes to academic success, schools are only a part of the pie. The frustration comes at being blamed for the failure of the whole pie.”

— Educator

“Nothing is holding parents accountable.”

— Educator

“We — as a society, not just the school — need to assist families.”

— Educator

“The school administration needs to be a part of the community — bring the community into the school and the school into the community.”

— Educator

new schools address unmet needs or that all schools fulfill their mandates.

Students’ out-of-school environments have a dramatic impact on their readiness to learn, and Delaware educators feel frustrated that they are sometimes held accountable for these beyond-the-classroom challenges. Many educators believe that society as a whole needs to be more involved in preparing children to learn and, more specifically, that better parental and community engagement would improve Delaware students’ academic achievement. Unfortunately, the government and nonprofit structures that are designed to serve these needs are not well-coordinated or sufficiently funded.

Finally, there are inefficiencies and the confusion of roles in the delivery of public education. To this end, a number of stakeholders have suggested novel approaches for restructuring Delaware’s governance model at the state, district, and school levels. Ideas such as consolidating districts, establishing regional resource centers, reallocating responsibilities, and adjusting the roles of the Department of Education and/or the school boards may improve the public school system’s ability to serve its students.

While Delaware has high levels of overall funding, its resources are not distributed equitably and control at the local level is limited.

Effectiveness requires more than just garnering high levels of funding — that funding needs to be fairly allocated and effectively used. Currently, Delaware ranks 8th nationally in education spending per student, but only 25th in the percentage of its funding that it devotes to instructional expenses. This is only partly explained by Delaware’s small size; even compared to other small states, Delaware’s spending is relatively high. And although the variation in funding across districts is relatively small compared to other states, Delaware’s highest-funded districts spend 45 percent more per pupil than its lowest-funded districts.*

Furthermore, state funds are not necessarily being directed to schools with the greatest needs; districts with high proportions of at-risk students are not systematically receiving proportionately higher levels of funding. Instead, the unit system allocates teacher units propor-

*Variation on 2003–04 current expenses per pupil, by enrollment, excluding vo-tech districts

tionally across districts, providing additional funding for special education and vocational education but not other at-risk students. Because teacher salaries increase with education and experience, and average teacher education and experience levels vary widely across districts, some districts receive significantly more state funding for teacher salaries than others despite similar teacher units. In addition, many administrators feel constrained by insufficient levels of discretionary funding. Only 8 percent of state funds (Division III — Equalization) are currently truly discretionary at the district level.

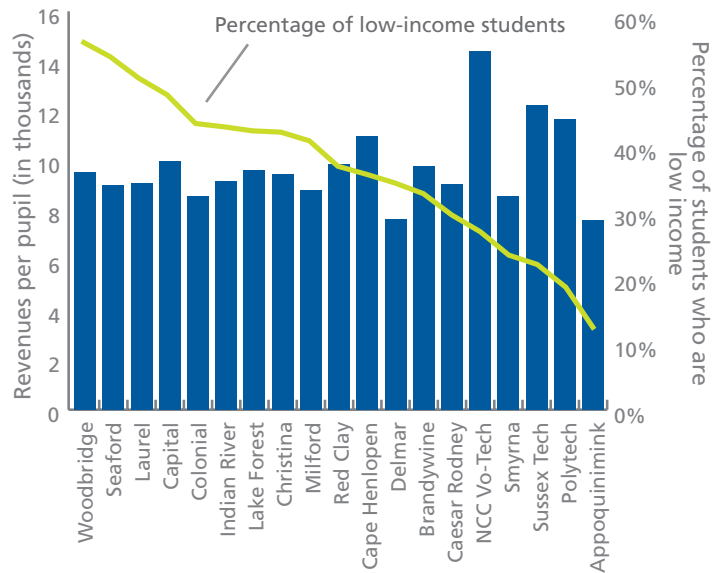
Delaware among Leaders in Per-Pupil Spending, But Less Money Gets to the Classroom

Education spending per student, 2003	Percentage of spending for instruction, 2000
\$9,472	61.5%
U.S. Rank	
8th	25th

Source: EPE "Education Counts" report

State Funds Not Necessarily Directed to Highest Need: Districts with More At-Risk Populations Not Receiving Disproportionate Share of Funding

Division I and Division II state funding (2003–04)



Source: DDOE "Education Statistics"

Vision 2015 is being led by a 28-member Steering Committee composed of education, business, and community leaders. Four Work Groups with broader community representation — including parents, students, and community leaders — are helping us address the most important issues. And we are conducting dozens of focus groups and forums in all three counties to ensure that Vision 2015 will meet the needs of students throughout the state. Two international consulting firms are assisting in the effort: The Boston Consulting Group, which is providing research, analysis, and recommendations based on priorities established by the Steering Committee, and Cambridge Leadership Associates, which is facilitating the decision-making process. The Broad Foundation, based in Los Angeles, and the Rodel Foundation of Delaware are underwriting the development of the Vision 2015 blueprint.

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