

Vision 2015

Transforming Delaware's Education System

INSPIRING APPROACHES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

As we consider our vision for Delaware's public school system, we can look to other systems from around the world for promising examples of educational reform and student achievement. The following are brief summaries of some of the most notable systems. None of these systems is perfect — in fact, each recognizes that challenges remain and engages in a constant pursuit of improvement. Also, none of them pulled its approach to education out of a recipe book for school reform; similarly, we are not suggesting that these systems should be seen as recipes or prescriptions for Delaware. Rather, we hope that these global success stories will inspire broad and creative thinking as we begin our own path to a world-class system.

Global exemplars each present a different story of reform and success

Edmonton, Canada

After three decades of site-based management, school principals control more than 90 percent of their budgets, make hiring decisions, initiate supplemental programming and market their schools to prospective students and parents. The central office now focuses on systemwide performance improvements and providing support services to schools. **Results: Top performer in Alberta, Edmonton ranks first in reading and math worldwide.**

England, United Kingdom

England used a three-phase approach: centralized government control over curriculum and standards, followed by major investments in improving educator quality, followed by a current focus on using public-private partnerships to encourage the spread of specialist secondary schools (focused on 10 areas from the arts to engineering) and semi-autonomous education trust schools. **Results: Significant gains in English and math proficiency.**

Japan and South Korea

Both systems feature strong national curriculums, high-stakes testing, high teacher pay, more time for teacher development and planning, and more academic time for students — inside and outside of school. But education leaders in both countries are now trying to encourage more creativity and less rote learning. **Results: South Korea and Japan rank 1st and 2nd globally on an average of five performance tests.**

Victoria, Australia

Educator and leadership development is the cornerstone of Victoria's reform efforts. Leaders have created a culture of continuous improvement throughout the system and within individual schools by implementing a range of professional development initiatives coherently and strategically. **Results: Dropout rates are down, parent satisfaction is up.**



Victoria, Australia

The Australian state of Victoria has approximately 1,600 schools, and nearly 600,000 students and 40,000 teachers in an area twice the size of the state of Pennsylvania. All the schools report to a single director of schools in the state government; there are no school districts. In the mid-1990s major legislative changes gave schools significant autonomy, including control of hiring and 95 percent of school operational budgets. By decade's end, however, it was generally recognized that, while some schools were thriving with this new autonomy, others were falling behind. In response, Victoria mounted a reform effort that was similar in many ways to Vision 2015; it involved a broad range of community members and stakeholders in a variety of forums, including working groups, roundtables and town halls.

The reform agenda was presented in 2003 in the education minister's Blueprint for Government Schools, and it detailed 20 specific initiatives under seven "flagship strategies." The flagship strategies sought to address many of the same priority areas that have been surfaced by Vision 2015's Work Groups and Steering Committee — for example, school improvement, professional development and resource allocation.

Educator and leadership development is the bedrock of Victoria's reform efforts. Leaders have organized their actions around a belief that a culture of continuous improvement can be created throughout the system and within individual schools if a range of professional

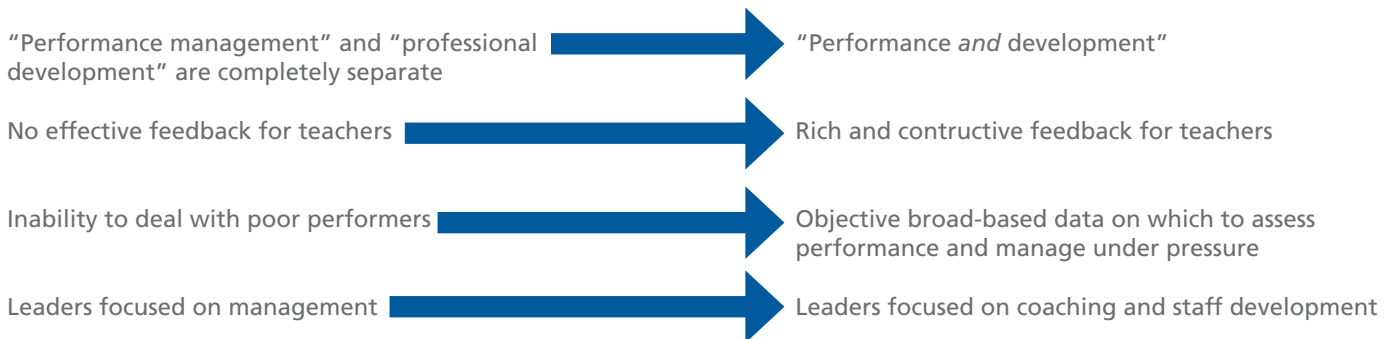
Victoria, Australia

- 1,615 schools, 580,000 students, 39,000 teachers
- Early reforms stressed autonomy, left some schools behind
- New reforms focus on educator development
- Changing culture through coordinated focus on continuous improvement
- Parent satisfaction up at all levels
- Dropout rates down 5%

development initiatives are implemented coherently and strategically. According to the director of schools, Victoria's first focus was "defining what it means to have an excellent professional environment. What will success look like? What will people's behavior be? What will they be able to do because of what we create?" Questions such as these spurred agreement on a set of shared definitions of what good teachers, principals and schools are, around which a strategy for action was developed.

From this platform, Victoria has implemented (or is in the process of implementing) several educator development initiatives, including providing richer feedback and personal development plans to teachers and principals; improving the career path opportunities for educators; and supporting the development of schools with cultures that value performance and development.

Moving to a performance and development culture



By the 1980s, it was widely known that public education in England was a mess. Despite repeated efforts to modify the system, it remained a reflection of the British class system — with a few very good schools for the fortunate, while the bulk of schools provided mediocre education or worse. Margaret Thatcher introduced a national testing system in the late 1980s that confirmed what most people already knew — that schools were failing — but provided few resources and little expertise to improve the situation. In 1997, Tony Blair’s government, having campaigned on a platform including broad education reform, began to implement an ambitious reform agenda that continues today.

The first step in the government’s reform was to centralize standards and accountability by rewriting and simplifying the national standards for schools and implementing a national curriculum for core subjects, including mandatory programs for primary school literacy and numeracy. These reforms were designed to clarify and reaffirm permanent objectives for student learning in schools and to provide immediate stop-gap attention to the most pressing vulnerabilities of failing schools. The next step included major strategic investments to help the system meet those objectives. New efforts to recruit and train teachers were accompanied by a 20 percent increase in teacher salaries and a reduction in the administrative workload assigned to teachers.

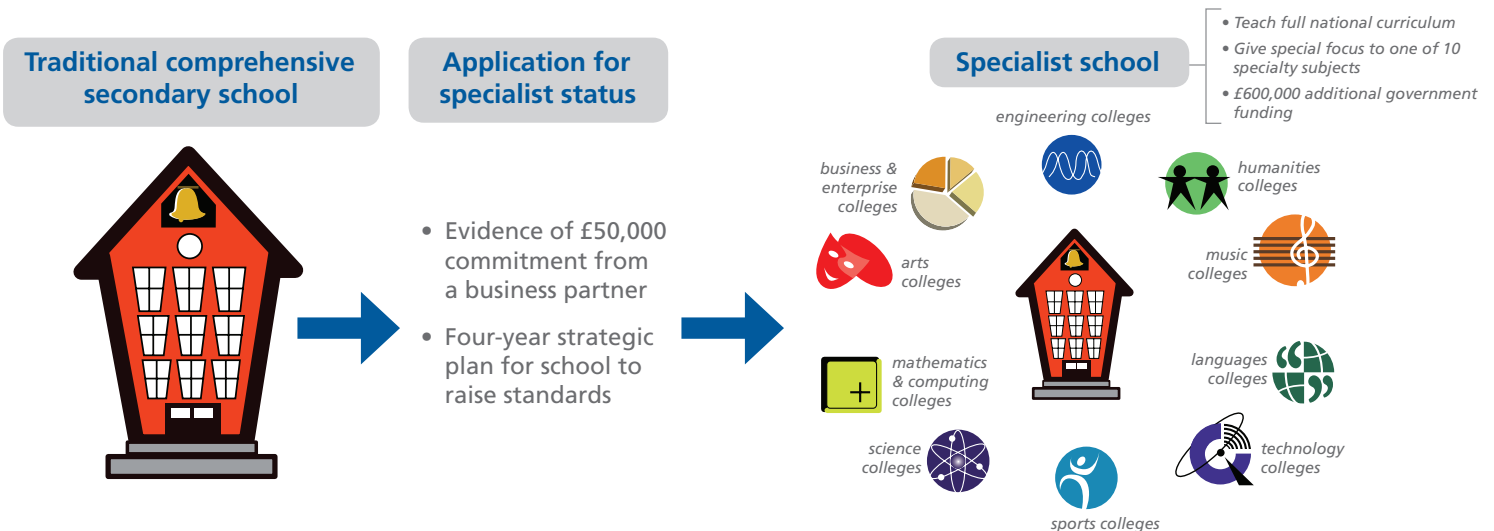
England, United Kingdom

- 21,500 schools, 7.5 million students, 435,000 teachers
- Centralized government control over curriculum and standards
- Major investments in improving educator quality, recruitment, training and pay
- New models of governance
- Public-private partnerships to encourage specialized schools in 10 areas (arts to technology)
- 75% of public secondary schools now specialist schools
- Percentage of students leaving primary school without even basic English knowledge dropped from 37 to 21 since 1997 — and from 38 to 25 in math

The last wave of reforms, begun in 2001, has introduced new models of school governance and specialization. Today, 75 percent of all secondary schools, serving 2.5 million students, are specialist schools, which teach the full national curriculum while giving special focus to one of 10 subjects, from the arts to engineering. Additionally, all new schools are Education Trust/Foundation schools — schools managed and maintained by a school governing board and exercising considerable autonomy. As they look to the future, architects of England’s reforms see an era in which, with increasing autonomy and accountability, individual schools will drive reform as they innovate to discover the next generation’s best practices in education.

England is moving toward a system of unique schools

75 percent of publicly financed secondary schools now have specialist status



Source: "US and UK Educators Seek Answers to Common Woes," Education Week 4/17/2004

Edmonton, Alberta

Over the past decade, this city of about 1 million people in the Canadian province of Alberta has become a hot-spot for international educators seeking lessons to export from the successful Edmonton Public Schools district. Edmonton Public Schools matches or outperforms the province on all measures, while the province, if it were an independent country, would have been the top performer on Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) exams in both 2000 and 2003.

Edmonton Public Schools — with nearly 200 schools serving nearly 80,000 students — has 30 years of experience with “site-based management.” What began as a pilot project in the 1970s, with a superintendent who believed that principals ought to be “captains of their own ships,” expanded to all schools in 1980.

Today, principals in Edmonton control 92 percent of their budgets, make hiring decisions, initiate supplemental programming and market their schools to prospective students and parents. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the central office made a transition, too — shifting from an administrative bureaucracy into a data-driven organization focused on performance and a key vendor of support systems to schools. The district continues to identify common school needs that can best be provided from central office — such as financial management tools or a recent districtwide effort at instructional improvement — and to lend strategic support to innovative successful schools.

Over the years, Edmonton has studied and refined the weighted student formula used to distribute funds to schools. In the mid-1980s the funding formula included more than two dozen different levels and categories; today, eight individual student funding weights (such as

Edmonton, Alberta

- 199 schools, 79,000 students, 7,300 teachers
- Site-based management for three decades
- Local autonomy complemented by accountability and supportive infrastructure
- Principals control 92% of budgets, hiring and marketing
- Central office shifted from administrative bureaucracy to performance management organization and key vendor of supports to schools
- 31 different educational options offered, about half of students attend a school other than their neighborhood school
- Edmonton top performer in Alberta
- Alberta, as a country, would rank first in reading and math on PISA

extra funding for special education students and International Baccalaureate students) dictate the vast majority of school funding allocations. In addition, the district uses block grants to encourage schools to establish new programs; support schools providing a broader range of services to disadvantaged students; and compensate schools that provide specialized programs for special needs students whose costs significantly exceed the funds they receive through the student funding formula. This approach to funding allows Edmonton to provide a rich set of options to parents and students; 31 different educational approaches and specialties are offered across the district, and approximately 60 percent of high school students exercise their opportunity to choose the best school for their learning style and interests.

Before site-based management, there was dysfunction

A typical scenario in the 1960s ...

A principal in Edmonton decided his school needed a library, so



He called the Director of Library Services at central office



Who told him that the central office could send him some books



Then he called the maintenance office to arrange lumber for shelves



But they turned down his request because there was no money left for such expenditures



A few days later, maintenance office workers showed up at the school with new doors and told the principal that it was time for all his school's doors to be replaced!



Japan and South Korea

It is common knowledge that several Asian countries consistently outperform the United States and most European countries on international measures of academic achievement. Japan and Korea both have high-performing school systems built on a strong tradition of rigor. The Japanese system was originally modeled on the U.S. system during the American occupation after World War II, with local districts exerting significant control; the Korean system, in turn, was modeled on Japan's. However, both systems have since adopted a strict centrally dictated curriculum. The Japanese curriculum, interestingly, does not prescribe a minimum level of student learning for all, but rather a maximal goal; it is explicitly expected that only 70 percent of primary school students, 50 percent of middle school students, and 30 percent of high school students will master the curriculum.

Both Japan and Korea invest heavily in teachers, and they benefit from cultures that revere the teaching profession; as a Korean proverb declares, "One should not step even on the shadow of one's teacher." The salary for experienced teachers in Korea is more than twice as high as in the United States when compared to GNP per capita. Teacher workload is structured differently than in the United States, with Japanese and Korean teachers spending much more time on out-of-classroom activities such as lesson planning, grading and professional development. Surprising to some, Japan and Korea produce high student achievement despite having the largest average class sizes among industrialized countries; for example, the average elementary school class size is 25 in the United States, 40 in Korea.

Japan and South Korea

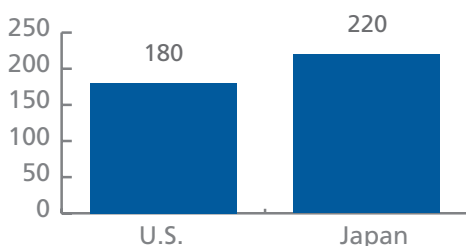
- **Japan: 44,000 schools, 14 million students, 925,000 teachers**
- **South Korea: 13,000 schools, 7.8 million students, 265,000 teachers**
- **National curriculum, high class sizes**
- **High-stakes testing, significant private tutoring**
- **Beginning to shift to more customized approaches**
- **High teacher pay, more teacher time for planning**
- **Japan: 2nd in world on average of 5 performance measures, such as TIMSS and PISA; middle of pack on average of 5 measures of student equity**
- **South Korea: 1st in world on average of 5 performance measures, such as TIMSS and PISA; 6th in world on average of 5 measures of student equity**

Finally, high-stakes testing determines many aspects of a student's future options in both systems, and employers use educational performance as a key criterion in hiring; some employers only hire students from certain universities. Because of this approach, each stage of schooling is seen as part of a path toward future employment. Japanese students spend far more time on academics than their American peers (see chart, below). However, even education leaders within these systems recognize that the high-stakes approach involves trade-offs. Concerns about student stress levels in Japan have been common for years, and recent reforms in Japan have aimed at moving away from a focus on rote learning and toward a system that also encourages creativity and "comprehensive learning."

Japan's school year is 40 days longer than in U.S., but even this understates the difference in hours of education

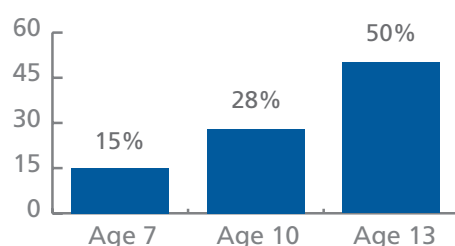
School year is 40 days longer than in U.S. ...

Number of days in school year



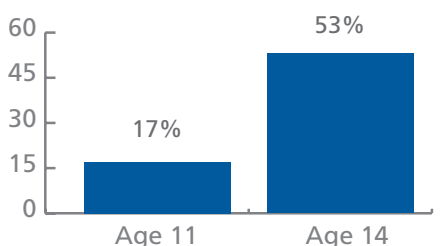
... and Japanese students commonly attend "juku crammers" at night ...

Students at each level attending juku crammers



... often in addition to more than two hours of homework

Students at each level studying more than two hours a night



Source: www.ed.gov, asianinfo.org, www.nctm.org, Japanese MOE statistics 2004, Vision 2015 team analysis

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.

Steering Committee

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**Member of Executive Committee*

Italic denotes ex officio member

To get involved in Vision 2015 or to learn more about education in Delaware and around the world, please visit our Web site: vision2015delaware.org.