



IMAGINE...
the best schools
in the world
for every Delaware student
... no exceptions ...
no excuses ...
that's **VISION 2015**

Executive Summary | October 2006

Vision 2015 demonstrates an unprecedented commitment by Delaware to address the most urgent issue of our time: securing a high-quality education for every child in the state by 2015. Led by a 28-person Steering Committee of Delaware's education, business, government and community leaders — with advice from several hundred teachers, principals, parents, students and lay citizens — this collaborative effort will create real opportunity for today's students and future generations to come.

THE ECONOMIC AND MORAL CHALLENGE OF OUR TIME

Education has long been the gateway to opportunity, allowing families to live the American Dream, with each generation more prosperous than the preceding one. For most of the past century, that dream has come true for millions of Americans, including citizens of Delaware.

But as the data show, we now face formidable challenges at home and abroad (see sidebar). Unless we accelerate progress, we risk dooming our children and society to a second-class future, stuck with a growing share of low-wage, low-opportunity jobs.

Equally important are the moral stakes. For too long, too many of our citizens — notably low-income and minority families — have been denied the fruits of the American Dream. The fact that only 1 in 10 African American and Hispanic students earns a postsecondary degree is unconscionable. Who are we — as mothers and fathers, as grandparents, as citizens — if we let these gaps persist? Who are we if we do not stand up for excellence and equity — not just for our own children but for all of Delaware’s children?

We must be bold

Consider how fundamentally the world has changed: Countries such as Finland, Latvia and South Korea are ahead of us educationally; innovation is driving increased global economic competition; students will have three or four different careers during their lifetimes; Google, not the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, has become the reference of choice.

But educationally we are largely stuck in a time warp, “doing school” the way our parents and grandparents did. We use a nine-month calendar that was originally intended to free up students to work during the summer. Learning schedules are based on a factory model that assumed most graduates were headed to life on the assembly line. Teacher pay is based on seniority, degrees and years of experience, rather than on levels of teaching effectiveness and success. Unnecessary rules and policies inhibit teachers, principals and families. There is little incentive to innovate. The structure of our system means that too many decisions are made too far from the individual student. Too many students have been neglected.

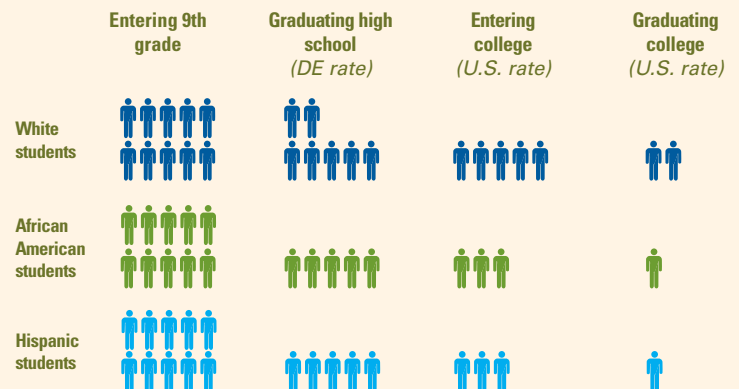
It is not that teachers, principals and others inside and outside the system are not working hard. They are. And we have made progress. But our current system and structure were built for another time; we are still using the equivalent of vinyl records in an age of iPods.

Delaware: Middle of the pack nationally

Despite some recent gains and inspiring pockets of excellence, Delaware’s public education system remains in the middle of the pack nationally:

- Among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, we rank **8th** in spending, but only **27th** in performance.
- Only **30 percent** of our 8th grade students meet national standards in reading and math.
- Only **1 in 4** Delaware students who are behind in math in 3rd grade catch up by 10th grade.
- Learning gaps are huge; while **half** of Delaware’s white 4th graders are proficient in math and English on national tests, only **15 percent** of African American students are.

Only 1 in 10 minority students earns a postsecondary degree



Source: Editorial Projects in Education, 2003; NCES, 2006; DDOE and BCG analysis.

Delaware is fortunate

Compared to many other states, our challenges are manageable, our small size is an asset, and our recent progress and many excellent educators hint at what is possible ahead. Is our agenda ambitious? Yes. Doable? Absolutely. To envision what is possible in the next decade, think back 10 years ago: no Google, no eBay, no iPods, only a small fraction of the current e-mail and cell phone traffic.

It is time to trade in our outdated, “one-size-fits-all” system for a much more creative approach that capitalizes on the opportunities of today’s world. We must build on recent progress, but where current approaches are not working, we must work boldly with educators and the community to create new ones. Our children deserve it. Our future demands it.

Please join us.

PUTTING STUDENTS AT THE CENTER

Going forward, all policies and actions must answer the central question: How can we best tailor learning so that each student succeeds? With students at the center, the main changes must occur closest to the student — in schools and classrooms.



1 We must set our sights high, with challenging expectations for every child, coupled with high-quality curriculum and additional instructional time to give students a good shot at meeting the higher standards. We

know that students rise to the challenge. Recommendations include:

- ✓ Academic standards as challenging as the world's best
- ✓ A statewide research-based curriculum so that all Delaware students are learning at the same high standards
- ✓ Aligned model lessons, teaching tools, diagnostic assessments and classroom-based professional coaching to help teachers meet each student's learning needs
- ✓ Assessments that measure individual student gains over time
- ✓ State funding for an additional 140 school hours a year with guidance on how to use the time best
- ✓ Implementation of the state's stronger graduation requirements
- ✓ Expanded online distance learning to allow true 24/7 learning opportunities

2 We must invest in early childhood education, targeting more resources to high-need children. We know that such experiences translate directly into long-term success. Recommendations include:

- ✓ Tuition subsidies for more low-income 3- and 4-year-olds
- ✓ Required participation in the Delaware Stars for Early Success Program, which sets high-quality program standards
- ✓ Annual license renewals for all early child care and education providers to ensure consistent high quality
- ✓ Additional professional development for providers so that they have the knowledge and skills to serve our youngsters well
- ✓ Data systems to share information and follow educational progress of students from prekindergarten through grade 12
- ✓ Increased coordination across service agencies for children from birth to age 3

3 We must develop and support great teachers in every classroom who are able to customize instruction to each and every child. We know that great teachers are the most important influence in producing great students. Recommendations include:

- ✓ A new career path, with advanced positions such as mentor and master teacher
- ✓ Advancement based on skills and performance, not seniority, with student achievement as one measure of performance

- ✓ A negotiated statewide salary structure to reduce inequities across the state
- ✓ Incentives to attract teachers to high-need subjects, like math and science, and to low-performing, high-need schools
- ✓ Bonuses for schools that meet or exceed agreed-upon goals for improvements in student achievement
- ✓ A formal evaluation process that measures teacher progress against clear standards and provides specific and actionable feedback
- ✓ Professional development based on the state's academic standards and focused on in-classroom coaching and mentoring rather than on isolated workshops
- ✓ New professional development centers to encourage the sharing of information and best practices
- ✓ Creative approaches to recruit and train an expanded pool of new teachers, including those who want to change careers
- ✓ More supports to help new teachers succeed, such as realistic course loads, assignments and class sizes

4 We must empower principals to be great school leaders, with enough knowledge, authority and flexibility to get results. We know that great principals, working closely with teachers and families, are needed to support great teaching in every classroom. Recommendations include:

- ✓ Broader principal control of decision-making related to people, resources and time
- ✓ Increased accountability for student achievement and school performance
- ✓ The flexibility to choose from among approved providers of educational services
- ✓ A statewide leadership academy for world-class principal recruitment, induction, retention and development
- ✓ A statewide base salary schedule, with significant bonuses tied to student achievement
- ✓ More easily accessible data on student performance, staffing and finances to help principals make better decisions

5 We must encourage instructional innovation and family involvement and require the accountability of all partners. We know that one size does not fit all. Parents, students and educators should have the freedom to choose the educational approach that will help all students reach the standards; this may mean a Mandarin Chinese-focused school for some ... an arts magnet school

Imagine all the benefits from our investments

On average, every additional student who graduates from high school ...

- Generates an additional **\$600,000** in lifetime earnings and contributes **\$50,000** more in state and local taxes than a high school dropout.
- And saves society **\$41,000** in Medicaid costs and **\$25,000** in prison costs.

On average, every additional student who graduates from high school and from college ...

- Generates an additional **\$1.4 million** in lifetime earnings and contributes **\$120,000** more in state and local taxes than a high school dropout.
- And saves society **\$71,000** in Medicaid costs and **\$34,000** in prison costs.

Keeping all of our students engaged in and excited about their learning leads to productive citizens, good neighbors and healthy communities.

... or science and technology program ... or online courses ... and so on. We also know that this will require us to create many new options; just improving current programs will not be enough to create the dynamic system we need. And we must expect excellence from all sectors — teachers, principals, parents, administrators, business and community leaders, legislators, and students themselves — and reward it. Recommendations include:

- ✓ Multiple efforts to inform and involve parents and families, including leadership and advocacy training and an online Web portal to share school information
- ✓ A statewide Office of Innovation to share information on best practices and encourage new programs
- ✓ An “equity advocate” to ensure that the special needs of students are met with proper resources
- ✓ Stronger partnerships with community organizations and businesses to provide more support for students: from better health care to on-the-job internships that tie to coursework
- ✓ A common scorecard that shares information about student gains, family-school interactions, fiscal accountability, and the satisfaction of educators, parents and students

- ✓ A stronger accountability system that focuses on student achievement, not simply how well educators comply with federal and state rules
- ✓ On-site school reviews and school improvement teams that can rapidly improve underperforming schools
- ✓ A commitment to identify and replicate schools and programs that work

6 Finally, we must have a simple and fair funding system whereby resources follow individual students and are allocated based on their needs. We know

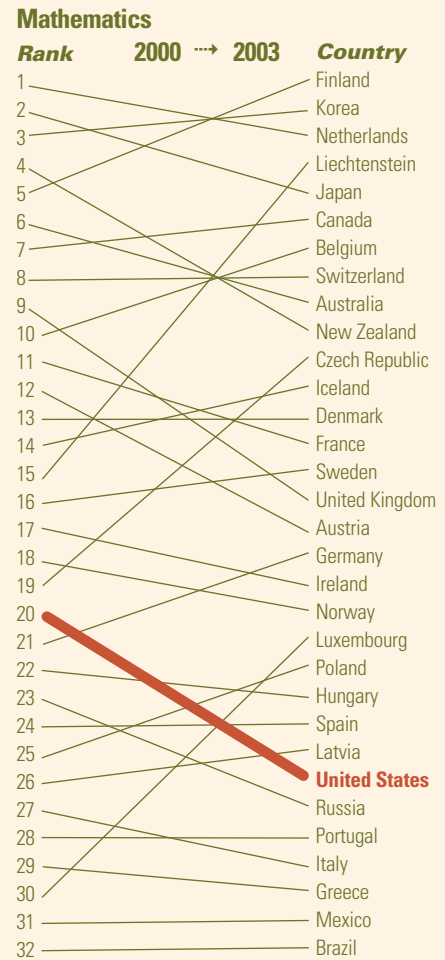
some students, whether struggling or accelerating, will need more resources than others. Recommendations include:

- ✓ A weighted student funding formula that allows students who need more support (special education, low-income, gifted/talented, etc.) to get the support they need to reach the same high standards
- ✓ Funds distributed directly to districts and schools, giving principals flexibility for how funds are spent, along with the accountability for results
- ✓ State funding high enough so districts and schools do not need to rely on local referenda to meet Vision 2015 standards
- ✓ A negotiated statewide teacher salary schedule tied to the new career path
- ✓ Understandable budget information that is readily accessible to all, from principals to parents
- ✓ A common scorecard to hold schools and districts accountable for the academic results of their spending choices
- ✓ A careful analysis of how current education dollars could be spent more effectively

These are the six building blocks on which our vision is based. Other states and school systems have adopted one or more of these elements, but Delaware will be the first to address them all in such a coherent and comprehensive way.

The U.S. Is Performing Poorly Internationally

Low and declining U.S. performance in math — with similar declines in reading and science — on the PISA test, which is given to students in the United States and more than three dozen other countries



Source: NCES, 2005; OECD, PISA, 2003.



BOTTOM LINE: For every \$1 we invest in better education, the citizens of Delaware can expect an extraordinary return. Can we afford *not* to make this investment?

NEXT STEPS

The recommendations in this report cannot be implemented overnight. They will require significant changes in policies and in practice — from the capitol to the classroom. In some cases, these changes will accelerate current progress; in other cases, we will need to break the mold to create new schools and structures to meet the needs of our children. We intend to implement our action plan in phases over the next several years. Early priorities are to train and recruit excellent teachers and principals and to strengthen our standards, curricula, assessments and data systems. We are inviting districts and schools from across the state to begin implementing Vision 2015 and, in the process, become models for us all. We are working closely with public officials, policymakers, and business and community leaders to implement the changes necessary to make Vision 2015 a reality. And we will be creating a new nonprofit advocacy and support organization to keep the spotlight on the need for these changes ... and to help schools, districts and their communities put them into action.

PUTTING DELAWARE FIRST

Our plan is bold and integrated, with all the recommendations reinforcing one another. If implemented as designed, Delaware will be at the forefront nationally and internationally in many ways:

- ✓ **Academic standards** — benchmarked against the world's best
- ✓ **Early childhood education** — among the most comprehensive in the world
- ✓ **Family and community partnerships** — one of the nation's leaders in involving parents and building strong business and civic partnerships
- ✓ **Teacher professionalism** — the first state with a true teacher career ladder based on skills and performance
- ✓ **Empowered principals and teachers** — one of the first places in the world to focus decision-making closest to the student
- ✓ **Simple and fair funding** — one of the first states in which funding is driven by the needs of individual students
- ✓ **Academic time** — the most in the nation, with an additional 140 hours of instruction a year
- ✓ **Assessments and accountability** — one of the first states to use year-to-year student achievement gains as an accountability cornerstone
- ✓ **System of high-performing schools** — the first state to replicate successful schools systematically

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