

## Independent Funding Assessment Release Quick Facts and Things to Know

December 2023

### What is this report and why is it being released?

The Independent Funding Assessment is the final component of the *Delawareans for Educational Opportunity v. Carney* lawsuit settlement. In 2018, a coalition of plaintiffs, including NAACP Delaware and Delawareans for Educational Opportunities, claimed Delaware's education system "does not comply with the Education Clause of the Delaware Constitution because, as a result of its system of education funding and governance, the state does not provide all low-income children, children with disabilities and children whose first language is not English with an adequate education." The suit was settled before trial, in October 2020. The lawsuit settlement required the state to hire an organization that is independent of the State, following State bidding laws and regulations to conduct an assessment of the state's school funding system. The state hired American Institutes of Research (AIR) to conduct the study.

### What will it address?

This report will assess Delaware's education funding system's current state and future recommendations. AIR has outlined three key areas that their report will focus on and make recommendations to address:

- 1. Adequacy:** Are current funding/spending levels sufficient to meet the state's educational goals?
- 2. Equity:** How is existing school funding distributed with respect to student needs and other characteristics?
- 3. Wealth Neutrality:** To what extent are school funding levels dependent on local revenue capacity?

### Is Delaware already addressing these challenges?

Even before the lawsuit was settled, Governor John Carney began addressing the challenge of supporting all students' unique needs through an initiative known as **Opportunity Funding**, which provides schools with additional resources for each of their low-income, special needs, and multilingual students. Opportunity Funding was written into state code and funded through annual increases from 2021-2026 as a result of the lawsuit settlement.

Lawsuit plaintiffs settled, considering the terms the "floor"—a minimum required level of progress, knowing more would be needed to provide Delaware students an adequate and equitable education. Recommendations from the assessment are intended to help determine future steps needed and spur action to modify the state's funding formula.

### Vision Coalition of Delaware Perspective

The AIR funding report can provide Delaware a roadmap to fund every student sufficiently and flexibly to meet their needs—including additional funding based on need for:

- Students from low-income backgrounds
- Multilingual learners
- Students with disabilities

The assessment will include a comparative analysis with other states, most of which have adopted funding formulas that provide resources at higher rates to low-income, special education, and multilingual learners.

The Vision Coalition's 10-year plan for public education, *Student Success 2025*, recommends:

- Allocating funding to respond to individual student needs
- Updating our system so funds follow students
- Allowing students to take courses across schools, online and in higher education
- Increasing equity and flexibility
- Building more transparent and efficient systems

**Updates to school funding should preserve the strengths of Delaware's current system—**including maintaining:

- **Predictability**, so districts and schools know they can expect an adequate level of funding each year
- **Sustainability** to ensure funding is ongoing and can support staff and multi-year initiatives
- **Statewide educator salary scale** that ensures equitable minimum pay across the state
- **Public funding for public schools** to ensure these funds support public schools— not creating a voucher system for families

No district or charter should lose funding; the state should take a “hold harmless” approach, and changes should be phased in over time.

## What does this report do? What's next?

The report is required to be submitted to the governor, the Secretary of Education, Speaker of the House, Senate Pro Tempore and the House and Senate Education Committees. The assessment does not obligate the state to take any action and is limited to providing information concerning potential modifications and improvements to the financing of Delaware's public school system. **Action will be required from policymakers to implement the recommendations.**

## We look forward to learning...

1. If implemented, what would these recommendations mean for each district and school?
2. How do these recommendations align with those of the Public Educator Compensation Committee, which include substantive salary increases for educators?
3. How much more funding, over time, would be needed to achieve an adequate and equitable system? And, how would more money be used to help students and educators?
4. What would the report's recommendations mean for local property taxes?
5. How have other states modified their systems to be more student centered?
6. What does the report recommend in terms of local (district-level) funding and equalization across districts and schools to achieve wealth neutrality?
7. What happens next? How can we support the governor and legislators to implement these recommendations?