

SECURING A HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION FOR EVERY CHILD IN DELAWARE^{1,2}

A Case

When Valerie Woodruff, Delaware's Secretary of Education, reflected on the progress her state had made in public education, she could feel proud. Ever since a "gap analysis" in 1990 revealed substantial differences in the academic achievement of white and minority students, her predecessors and she had undertaken a variety of initiatives aimed at sweeping educational reform. After consulting a broad range of citizens and education experts, the Delaware Department of Education had developed content standards specifying what students should know and be able to do. Statewide inservices then were arranged in order to introduce teachers and administrators to the standards. Delaware educators subsequently developed test questions based on the content standards. These questions served as the basis for the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP). Accountability legislation followed in 1997 and 1998. Requirements governing student promotion were specified. By 2002 all public schools in Delaware were held accountable for ensuring that students met these requirements. In 2002, Delaware schools, along with schools elsewhere in the United States, also became subject to additional accountability measures under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

To bolster these and other accountability measures, Delaware's systems for credentialing and evaluating public school teachers and administrators were upgraded. Foundation funding was obtained to support the professional development of school leaders and aspirants to school leadership positions. The University of Delaware launched the Delaware Academy for School Leadership to ensure that principals and other school leaders kept up with the latest

¹ This case was authored by Professor Daniel L. Duke and Michael J. Salmonowicz of the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education and the Partnership for Leaders in Education.

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developments in educational practice. In March of 2004 the Delaware Department of Education promulgated a revised comprehensive “strategic plan” to guide statewide educational improvement efforts for the ensuing five years.

The strategic plan opened with the mission of the Delaware Department of Education -- “To promote the highest quality education for every Delaware student by providing visionary leadership and superior service.” An organization chart and explanation of the various units of the Department of Education followed (see Exhibit I). The next section provided a set of principles governing educational reform in Delaware (see Exhibit II). The lead principle left no doubt about the central purpose of public education in Delaware:

The most important function of the Delaware public school system is to produce graduates with outstanding skills and knowledge in the core academic subjects of English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. These skills and knowledge provide students with the foundation to succeed in college and the workplace, and to be informed, engaged citizens.

After an “environmental scan” that listed recent accomplishments of and challenges facing the four branches of the Department of Education, the strategic plan concluded with five broad goals, each including long-term targets and performance measures. The first goal sent a clear message that the Department of Education planned to raise the level of student achievement in Delaware and that it needed to enlist the help of local schools and districts in order to do so.

Goal 1: In cooperation with districts and schools, continuously and significantly increase the percentage of students meeting Delaware standards, thereby improving student readiness for post-secondary education and work.

The remaining four goals involved the capacity-building that would be needed to achieve the first goal.

Goal 2: Design, develop and implement information systems to enhance the daily operations of the Department of Education, school districts, and schools.

Goal 3: Pursue removal of financial and structural barriers and reform.

Goal 4: Implement and sustain ancillary and supplemental services to students, districts, schools, educational organizations, human service agencies, and the Department of Education, to ensure optimal student learning and growth.

Goal 5: Improve district, school, and agency satisfaction regarding the quality of Department of Education leadership, service, and communication.

Valerie Woodruff had led the development of the first strategic plan for her predecessor, and she understood that it represented the keys to achieving the state's education mission. She also knew that her role involved more than managing the mission. Alan Blankstein, in *Failure Is Not An Option*, notes that "the mission statement reminds us of why we exist," but "a vision paints a picture of what we can become" (p.77). As Delaware's Secretary of Education, Woodruff was expected to point educators toward the future. Just what the future might look like eventually was articulated in a report entitled *Vision 2015*. Of all her accomplishments, Woodruff was perhaps most proud of this report (see Exhibit III).

The work of a 28-person Steering Committee representing educators, legislators, business and community leaders, and Department of Education officials, *Vision 2015* addressed "the most urgent issue of our time: securing a high-quality education for every child in the state by 2015." The six core recommendations in the report derived from a single, focusing question -- How can we tailor learning so that each student succeeds? The recommendations included the following imperatives:

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.

2. We must invest in early childhood education, targeting more resources to high-need children.
3. We must develop and support great teachers in every classroom who are able to customize instruction to each and every child.
4. We must empower principals to be great school leaders, with enough knowledge, authority and flexibility to get results.
5. We must encourage instructional innovation and family involvement and require the accountability of all partners.
6. Finally, we must have a simple and fair funding system whereby resources follow individual students and are allocated based on their needs.

Woodruff understood that achieving the goals of *Vision 2015* would be a stretch, but she also knew Delaware had a lot going for it. First and foremost, Delaware was a small state with only 19 school districts. Because all 19 districts were within a relatively short distance of the capital at Dover, Woodruff was able to meet monthly with the district superintendents. Frequent meetings greatly reduced the likelihood of communication and coordination problems.

Another plus for Delaware was a high level of receptivity for innovation and forward thinking. The state had been ahead of the curve in the move toward greater educational accountability. By the mid-nineties, Delaware had adopted uniform curriculum standards and begun developing state tests aligned to the standards.

A third strength was the willingness of Delaware educators to confront performance problems. As early as 1990, state officials recognized the achievement gap between white and minority students and committed to addressing it. Subsequently an Achievement Gap Action Group, a committee of the State Board of Education, was formed and included participation from the Department of Education, local district superintendents and curriculum leaders, higher

education, and community groups. The superintendents made narrowing the achievement gap a priority for their districts and schools. *Vision 2015*, which appeared in October of 2006, represented a re-commitment to narrowing the achievement gap as well as an admission that not enough progress had been made during the previous 15 years (see Exhibit IV).

Closing the achievement gap clearly was job one for Delaware educators, but other issues also required attention. When Woodruff convened a group of her advisors along with several superintendents in June of 2006, an array of pressing concerns were identified. They included the following:

- The quality of middle and high school education needs to be improved.
- A strategic plan had been adopted, but it had to be kept moving forward, even when Valerie Woodruff's term in office was over.
- A high percentage of Delaware students attended public charter as well as private and parochial schools. Public schools in Delaware therefore needed to become more competitive.
- In recent years, programs for at-risk students had proliferated, leading to coordination problems and "program fatigue." Not all programs were effective.
- A need existed for better alignment between state and local efforts to help at-risk students.
- Tensions existed between the state and school districts regarding the best way to balance local control and the state's commitment to an effective statewide process of improving public education.

As Valerie Woodruff reflected on the concerns expressed at the meeting, she recognized that no substantial headway could be made on any of the issues without a high level of cooperation between the state and local school systems. Just because she met regularly with the superintendents, there was no guarantee that they would see eye-to-eye with her dreams for public education in Delaware.

The View from Dan Curry's Office

Dan Curry was a newcomer to Delaware, having come from a superintendency in West Virginia to serve as superintendent of Lake Forest School District. Located in the agricultural heartland of Delaware, Lake Forest enrolled approximately 3,700 students. When asked about the issues that most concerned him, Curry were unambiguous. First, the achievement gap between white and minority students had to be narrowed. With the advent of the No Child Left Behind Act, student performance data was disaggregated by various student categories and reported to the public. No longer was it possible for a district like Lake Forest to offset low performance on the part of one group, poor students for example, by relatively high test scores from another group. Schools and school districts that failed to serve the academic needs of one or more designated student groups ran the risk of state sanctions.

Curry's second concern involved the recruitment and retention of teachers. He acknowledged that attracting teachers to a rural area and keeping them there were major challenges. One provision of the No Child Left Behind Act, however, required school districts to staff schools only with "highly qualified" teachers. Failure to do so also could result in sanctions. Curry worried that Lake Forest could not compete for teachers with higher-paying school systems elsewhere, but he also realized that the achievement gap was unlikely to be narrowed without a full complement of talented teachers.

Developing measurable objectives for Lake Forest's district goals was Curry's third major concern. Accountability was the name of the game in Delaware, as it was across the United States since the advent of the No Child Left Behind Act. Curry had worked with his School Board to develop a strategic plan with goals related to student academic achievement, staff development, managing enrollment growth (which averaged about 5 percent annually), and

improving the middle and high schools, but the plan needed benchmarks and measurable goals in order to be useful as a guide to improvement efforts and progress monitoring.

Curry was well aware that many hurdles had to be cleared on the road to a better school system. Once a homogeneous farming community, Lake Forest had become home to a growing number of newcomers whose aspirations and expectations for the school system did not necessarily match those of longtime residents. The rate of student mobility into and out of the district was climbing, presenting an additional challenge to teachers. Capital improvements were needed for several Lake Forest schools, but it was uncertain whether voters would support a referendum to fund the projects.

Dan Curry supported Valerie Woodruff's efforts as Secretary of Education and he recognized the value of a statewide strategic plan and powerful vision statement like *Vision 2015*, but he also knew that he could not ignore pressing local matters. A superintendent who spent too much time gazing at the horizon was apt to miss the potholes just in front of him.

A Plan Is Just the First Step

Before becoming Secretary of Education, Valerie Woodruff had been a school administrator. She realized that principals and superintendents live in a world of distractions. The clearest set of long-range goals and the most inspiring vision statement could be easily displaced by urgent local concerns. And there always were urgent local concerns.

Woodruff thought about Lillian Lowery, the new superintendent of the Christina School District, Delaware's largest, with 19,000 students. The district had been under court order regarding racial segregation. Although the court order had been lifted for all New Castle County school districts, including Christina, a subsequent law requiring neighborhood school plans had been passed by the Delaware General Assembly. The fact that Christina had not had a plan

approved by the State Board of Education created discontent among many district residents. Many of Christina's students had opted to attend charter and non-public schools. Lowery's predecessor had resigned suddenly, taking with him several key personnel and leaving behind a questionable 13 million dollar deficit. As committed as Lowery might have been to Woodruff's hopes for public education in Delaware, she faced an assortment of immediate concerns, ranging from resolving the district's financial crisis to re-gaining the public's trust. The state was insisting that districts provide "neighborhood schools," but if Christina complied with this initiative, it ran the risk of increasing *de facto* segregation by race. Lowery's predecessor had launched a variety of reforms and new programs, but they lacked alignment and coherence. Lowery also knew that some of the reforms had not proven to be effective and needed to be overhauled or eliminated. Relations with the local teachers union were far from ideal, and the district was entering a period when the contract had to be re-negotiated.

Christina, of course, was not typical of Delaware school districts, but Woodruff recognized that every one of the state's 19 districts faced its own local challenges. Meeting monthly with the superintendents, she knew of the issues with which Dan Curry was grappling. She understood that Susan Bunting in Indian River confronted a shortage of mathematics, science, and special education teachers. Additionally, Bunting worried about the high school dropout rate, low teacher and administrator salaries, and the need for better communications with the growing Hispanic community. Woodruff also had listened to Steven Godowsky, superintendent of the New Castle County Vocational Technical School District, express his concerns about program quality differences across his vocational-technical high schools, low expectations on the part of some staff members, and relations between academic instructors and vocational-technical instructors.

Valerie Woodruff's dream was that *Vision 2015* and the Department of Education's strategic plan would provide the impetus necessary to assist all 19 school districts with their particular concerns while moving them forward in a common direction. As she reflected on the ambitious agenda that had been set for Delaware schools during her watch, she pondered what it would take to actually get 19 unique school districts pulling together.

THE DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

In Delaware, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) was created in 1925. DPI's role in education was the same then as it is today; to work with school district administrators and all public schools, including charter schools, to provide the best education possible for all students. Over the decades DPI would continue to grow in size, in scope and in responsibility.

In 1997, legislation was passed to modify DPI by making the department a cabinet-level organization and changing its name to the Department of Education (DOE). Additionally, the position of State Superintendent would be replaced by the Secretary of Education who would serve at the pleasure of the Governor. Currently, Valerie A. Woodruff serves as Secretary. The Deputy Secretary serves at the pleasure of the Secretary.

DOE is currently comprised of four distinct branches: Curriculum and Instructional Improvement; Assessment and Accountability; Finance and Administrative Services; and Adult Education and Workforce Development. Optimally each branch is led by an Associate Secretary and all staff work in a collective effort to carry out the goals of the Department. Today, nearly 240 staff members comprise Delaware's Department of Education.

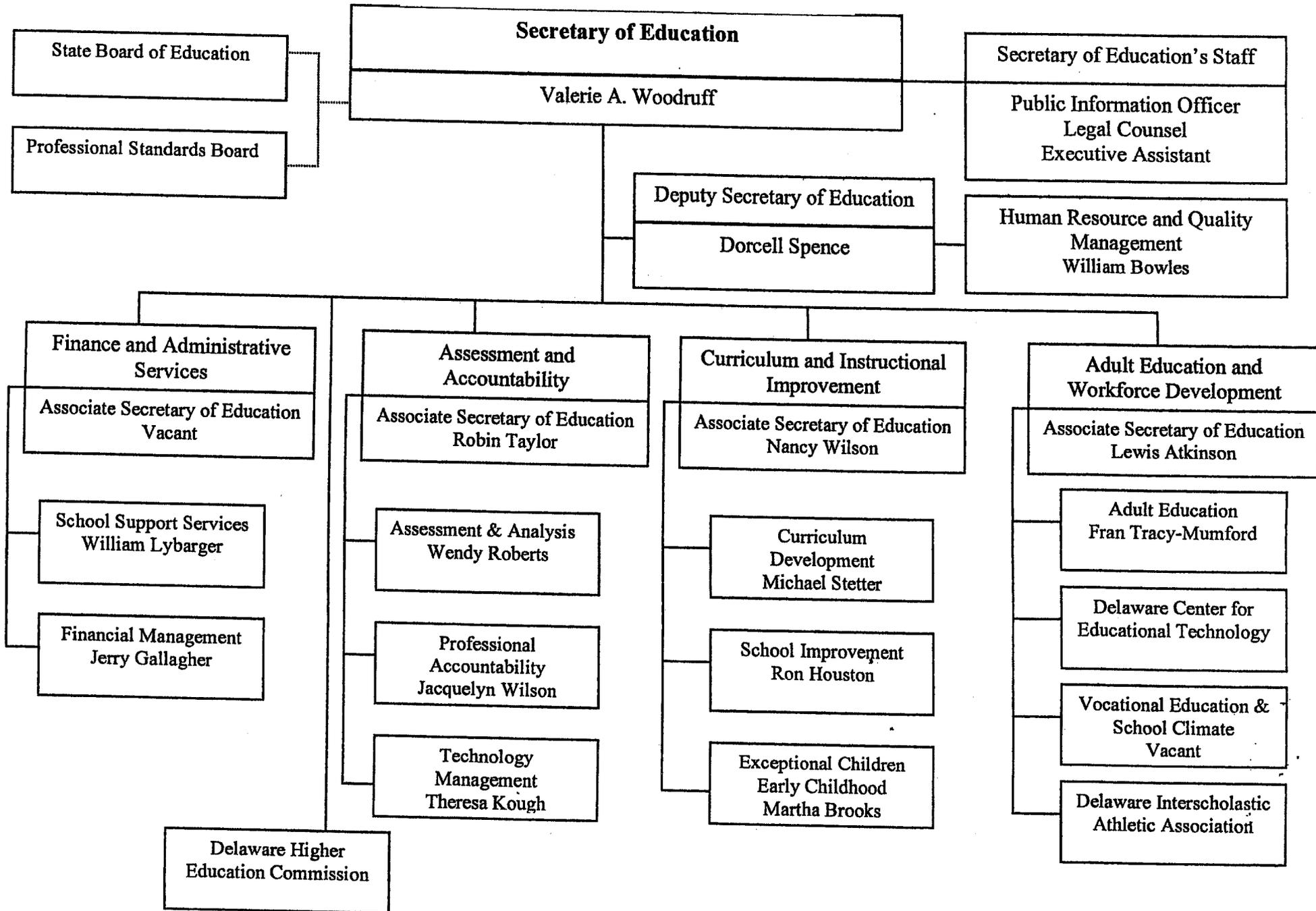
The Curriculum and Instructional Improvement Branch is responsible for curriculum development and standards which span early childhood education through grade 12, charter schools, the school improvement program, professional development, interagency initiatives, federal grants associated with Title I programs, and other programs including special education for disabled students.

The Assessment and Accountability Branch provides leadership and oversight for statewide student assessment and professional accountability, including educator licensure, certification and professional development. This branch is also responsible for implementation and administration of the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP).

The Adult Education and Workforce Development Branch is responsible for overseeing the operation of the adult education programs including the James H. Groves High School and prison education as well as the Even Start family literacy program. This branch is also responsible for school climate and discipline and vocational education and apprenticeship programs.

The Finance and Administrative Services Branch is responsible for budget and legislative issues, capital improvement programs, federal and state fund oversight, pupil transportation, interscholastic athletics, health services, nutrition, school choice, technology and regulations. Currently the responsibilities of this branch have been delegated to the Deputy and other Associate Secretaries because of a vacancy in this Associate Secretary position.

Department Of Education
Organization Chart
FY 2004



PRINCIPLES OF DELAWARE EDUCATION REFORM

This strategic plan continues to be based on the following principles of Delaware's education reform, as well as components of the reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, known as No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which both promote and support the raising of student achievement and closing the achievement gap.

These important principles are as follows:

- The most important function of the Delaware public school system is to produce graduates with outstanding skills and knowledge in the core academic subjects of English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. These skills and knowledge provide students with the foundation to succeed in college and the workplace, and to be informed, engaged citizens.
- The most important learning skill is reading. Students who cannot read experience significantly greater difficulty in learning other subject matter.
- The second most important skill is mathematics. Without solid mathematics skills, students cannot learn high-level content in science and cannot perform daily living functions such as balancing a checkbook or completing a recipe.
- The social promotion of students deficient in reading and mathematics is not consistent with the State concept of holding students accountable. Students must be challenged to meet high standards of performance early in their academic careers. It is not reasonable to wait until high school to impose performance requirements for academic progress – that is too late.
- The State should provide sufficient funding for summer school, Saturday school, and after-school instruction to help districts and students meet the challenges of ending social promotion, raising student achievement and closing the achievement gap.
- The public school system should be more accountable for how well it does in raising academic achievement for all students. Schools, districts and the State should all be held accountable for student academic outcomes.
- The State should provide support and assistance to low-performing schools and school districts to improve their services to students. Areas of specific need should be clearly identified and resources available to districts and schools should be carefully utilized to address the needs to achieve improvement.
- The State's role should be to ensure that educators entering service meet sufficient pre-service standards, and to ensure that the State provide incentives through the state salary scale and through professional/staff development funding so that

teachers pursue classroom-relevant training and mentoring which improves their performance.

- The State's pay plan is the primary incentive for educators to improve their skills and knowledge. The State should continue to reward educators for relevant, high-quality graduate education and national educator certification.
- The State should continue to provide efficient and effective service to all stakeholders by continually improving technological access.



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 persons — this collaborative effort will create real opportunity for today's students and future generations to come.

Vision 2015

Transforming Delaware's Education System

THE STATE WE'RE IN

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.

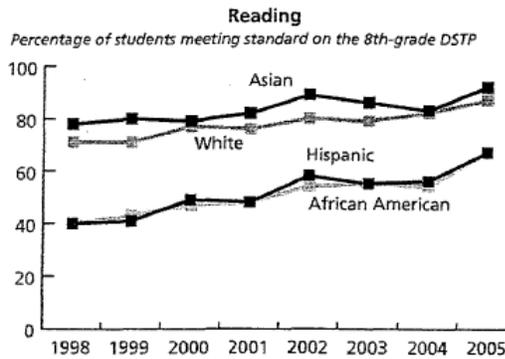
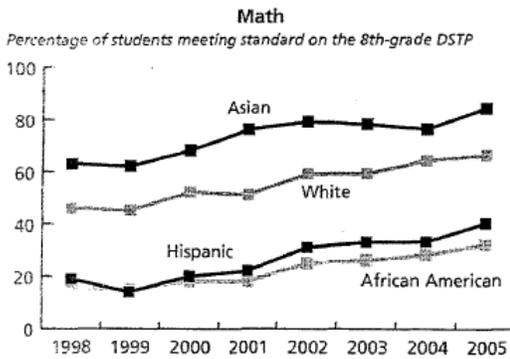
To build public understanding about the magnitude of the challenge and opportunity, the Vision 2015 Steering Committee plans to publish several issue briefs in the coming weeks. This first issue brief makes the case for change, based on significant research on educational achievement within Delaware, the United States more generally, and around the globe.

Delaware has a lot to be proud of

Student performance on the Delaware State Testing Program (DSTP) math and reading exams continues to improve. Between 1998 and 2005, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards on the state's spring math test rose an average of 22 points across all tested grades and an average of 16 points across all groups of 8th-grade students (including minority, limited English proficient, special education, and low-income students). In reading, the percentage meeting or exceeding standards rose an average of 20 points across all tested grades and an average of 22 points across all 8th-grade student groups. Delaware also ranked

among the top six states for gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam between 2003 and 2005. Furthermore, Delaware currently has many initiatives under way to sustain its progress, including the development of a recommended statewide curriculum; establishment of a better system for monitoring student progress from pre-K through college; piloting of a "next generation" of teacher evaluations and an assessment that better helps teachers adjust their instruction; roll-out of the eSchool Web-based student accounting system; and numerous other state and local programs.

DSTP Performance Trending Upward for All Student Groups



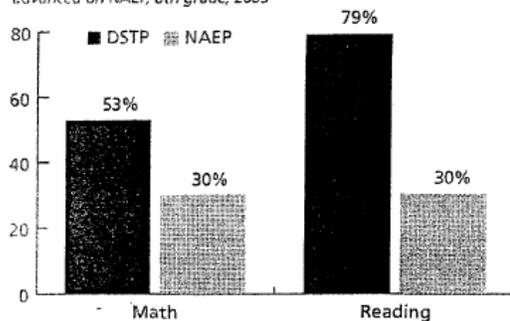
Despite real gains, Delaware's current performance relative to the rest of the U.S. is mediocre

Only 30 percent of Delaware's 8th graders score at or above "proficiency" on the math and reading NAEP exams, which places Delaware in the middle of the pack compared to other states. Moreover, 23 percent more 8th-grade Delaware students meet or exceed standard on the math DSTP than meet or exceed proficiency on the math NAEP, and 49 percent more meet or exceed standard on the reading DSTP than meet or exceed proficiency on the

reading NAEP, which illustrates a significant gap between Delaware's state standards and the more stringent NAEP expectations. In addition, Delaware's students perform worse than most other states on the SAT college admissions exam; even among the 24 states where more than 50 percent of students take the test, Delaware's mean combined score of 1005 places it 18th.

DSTP Proficiency Lower than NAEP Proficiency

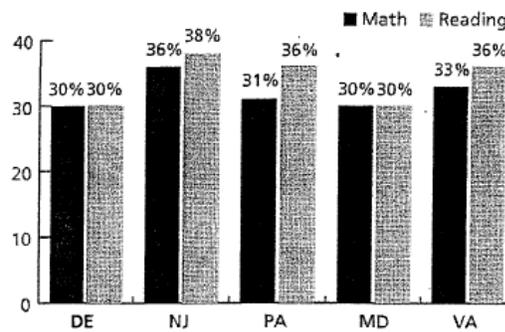
At or above standard on DSTP versus percentage proficient or advanced on NAEP, 8th grade, 2005



Source: DDOE DSTP online reports, NCES online NAEP Explorer

Delaware is in Middle of Pack Nationally and Behind Three of Four Neighboring States on NAEP

Percentage of students proficient or advanced, 8th-grade NAEP, 2005



Source: NCES online "NAEP Explorer"

Since the United States as a whole is not competitive internationally, Delaware's students are in a weak position versus the rest of the world

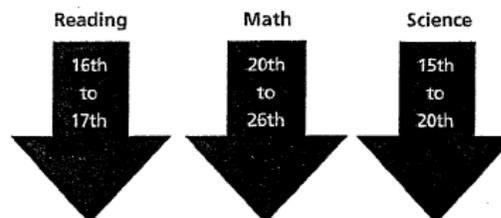
The United States lags most industrialized countries on international exams; our 15-year-olds' ranking on the reading, math, and science PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) tests was not only in the bottom half in 2005, but it also declined across those subjects between 2000 and 2005. Perhaps equally alarming is that the United States exhibits a much larger gap than most other countries between the scores of its average and lowest-performing students.

to foreign-born students. Thus, although America's superior economic position was founded on innovation and technological advancement, many multinational companies now are shifting their technical jobs to low-cost, high-talent countries such as China and India.

Furthermore, the United States is producing less science talent than in the past, losing ground to other countries — such as Singapore, China, France, and Korea — whose undergraduate students are significantly more likely to obtain natural science or engineering degrees (see next page). In addition, U.S. institutions currently award more than one third of their natural science Ph.D.s and more than half of their engineering Ph.D.s

U.S. Is Not Competitive on International Exams

Low and declining PISA performance from 2000 to 2003

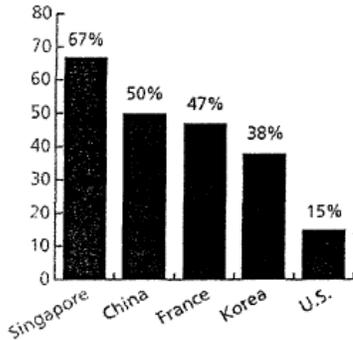


Source: NCES Digest of Educational Statistics, 2005; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), 2003

U.S. Not Producing Enough Competitive Science Talent

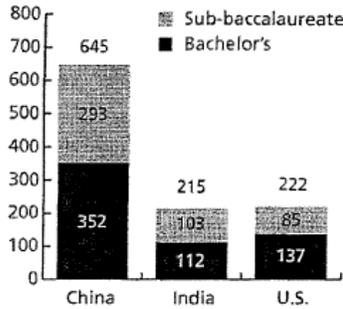
Few American students go into engineering and the sciences

Percentage of undergrad degrees in the natural sciences or engineering, 2004



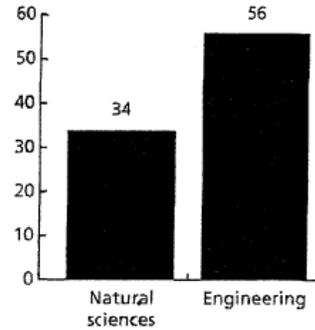
American science grads dwarfed by China's, and India is catching up

Number of engineering, computer science, and IT graduates, 2004



Foreign students fill U.S.: science Ph.D. programs

Percentage of U.S. Ph.D.s awarded to foreign-born students, 2004



Twice as many U.S. physics Bachelor's degrees awarded in 1956 (the year before Sputnik) as in 2004

Source: The National Academies, "Rising Above the Gathering Storm," 2006; Duke Master of Engineering Management Program, "Framing the Engineering Outsourcing Debate", 2005

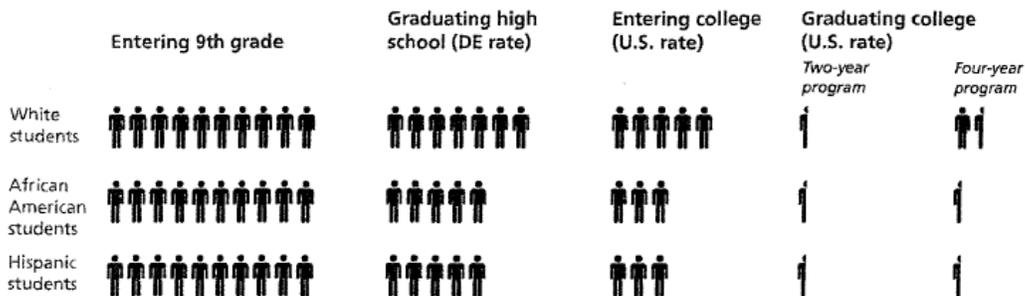
Despite significant individual and societal costs, too many Delaware students are dropping out of high school, and not enough are graduating from college

Only about two-thirds of white students and half of African American and Hispanic students in Delaware graduate from high school within four years. According to national college entrance and graduation rates, this implies that for every 10 white Delaware students entering 9th grade, only 2 will earn a postsecondary degree; and for every 10 minority Delaware students entering 9th grade, only 1 will earn a postsecondary degree.

Unfortunately, workers without a college degree face difficult futures. The real value of their expected

weekly earnings has dropped over the past 25 years, while college graduates' earnings have risen; today, the average high school dropout can expect to make about 2.5 times less than the average four-year college graduate — about \$400/week compared to \$990/week. Our failure to graduate students also carries significant societal costs. High school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested during their lifetime, nearly half of drug offenders are dropouts, and the death rate for dropouts is 2.5 times that of students with more than 13 years of education.

Far Too Many Delaware Students Drop Out of High School, Not Enough Graduate from College



Source: NCES, EPE "Education Counts" online database, "Postsecondary Education Opportunity" research letters

Now is the time for Delaware to act — the environment is right for fundamental educational transformation

Given its history of education innovation, its diverse student population, the large proportion of funding that schools receive from state sources, and its small relative population and geographic size, Delaware is an ideal place to initiate bold advances in the public school system. Furthermore, with technology capabilities

expanding, technology costs falling, global competitiveness rising, and thousands of newcomers entering the workforce, now is the ideal time to begin that transformation. We have a responsibility to our students, our community, and our country to act swiftly and boldly.

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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Italic denotes ex officio member*