



A World-Class Education for Every Child

Delaware's Plan to Strengthen Our Schools



Every child in Delaware deserves a world-class education. From the moment they leave our schools, Delaware's students will compete for jobs and college admission against students from across our country and around the globe. Their ability to compete – and Delaware's economic future – depends on providing Delaware students with the education they need to make a difference in the 21st century economy. Today and tomorrow, a thriving public education system is and will be the cornerstone to ensuring that Delaware remains an attractive place for families to live and for businesses to grow.

In order to improve the quality of Delaware schools and better prepare Delaware students for college, work and life, the Governor and the Department of Education have created an education reform action plan that represents the input of more than one hundred participants, including teachers, administrators, the business community, parents, the disabilities community, higher education leaders, and legislators.

This action plan focuses on four specific goals to help ensure that Delaware schools are world-class – improving student readiness, ensuring teacher quality, effectively using student data, and turning around persistently low-performing schools. The specifics of each goal are outlined below.

Improving Student Readiness: “Improve student readiness for post-secondary education and workforce opportunities by implementing rigorous college- and career-ready standards and valid and reliable high-quality assessments.”

Delaware needs to set high standards for what we want our children to learn. Those standards need to be benchmarked against both national and international standards to ensure that our children are prepared to compete in the world economy. Delaware also needs to measure effectively what our children have learned and use that information to ensure they are getting the best instruction possible. Delaware's education community will:

- Continue to participate with governors and state education leaders from across the country in the development of Common Core standards.
- Work with districts and charter schools to prioritize the standards and develop grade level expectation for Delaware students.
- Assist districts in development of instructional programs based on the Common Core standards, including programs for students with disabilities and those who are learning English as a second language.
- Implement a new student assessment system to replace the DSTP with the Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System ("DCAS") – a series of assessments that can be given up to three times a year to better assess student progress and help teachers adjust to each child's needs.

- Focus on incorporating Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (“STEM”) programs into schools, including the formation of a STEM Coordinating Council, implementation of STEM programs in all districts and some charter schools, and professional development focused on interdisciplinary teaching of STEM material.
- Maintain link between student assessments and graduation/end of course requirements.
- Permit districts to opt into receiving flexible funding – In order to opt in, districts must:
 - Have stakeholder support for doing so within the district;
 - Submit financial reports, including reports showing that the district has met goals set by the Department regarding the percentage of funding spent on instructional versus non-instructional expenses; and
 - Increase student achievement.

Ensuring Teacher Quality: “Improve teacher effectiveness and equitable distribution of qualified teachers for all students.”

Great teachers are the foundation of student success. Delaware will improve the way it prepares, hires, and supports teachers. Delaware must also evaluate how the best teachers in our schools developed those skills, and apply those lessons to developing teachers of the future. We will also better compensate teachers in the most challenging schools who have proven to be effective, and pursue funding capabilities to make that happen. Delaware’s education community will:

Provide Support for Educators:

- Strengthen the leadership in Delaware schools and the capacity of those leaders to engage with teachers to improve instruction by:
 - Encouraging districts to use teacher leaders within their schools to provide day-to-day feedback and support to other teachers;
 - Assisting districts in implementing a new collaborative leadership model that will allow principals to spend less time on administrative tasks and more time supporting educators; and
 - Continuing to develop a pipeline for strong school principals by establishing regional leadership preparation programs to assist districts and schools in school leadership succession planning.
- Assist districts in providing more collaborative time for their teachers by surveying current practices and providing technical assistance to districts and schools to assist them in identifying scheduling changes that will permit shared planning opportunities.
- Implement a parent education and awareness campaign to promote parental involvement.

- Implement performance incentives for schools that show school-wide student growth, and allow teachers to assist in deciding how the funding should be spent.
- Utilize the DCAS assessment system to ensure teachers receive real-time feedback on student achievement and are able to use that data to inform their planning and instruction.
- Provide training on current data systems to assist teachers in identifying areas needing focus in their classroom and in using the data proactively.

Enhance Educator Preparation and Selection

- Evaluate and improve the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs in our colleges and universities by using data systems to link teacher assessments to the teacher preparation programs from which the teacher graduated.
- Work with the institutions of higher education to establish teacher residency programs.
- Evaluate and support the newly implemented Teach for America program.
- Provide a statewide teacher application and website dedicated to recruitment of all education personnel.
- Work collaboratively with the Delaware State Education Association and the Delaware Economic Development Office to develop a statewide marketing strategy for promoting Delaware educator positions.
- Work with school districts on evaluating reforms that would help them hire the most qualified teachers out of college earlier in the process.
- Work with stakeholders to develop a robust program of alternative routes to certification for school administrators.

Improve Educator Assessment and Professional Development

- Adopt a robust rating system, for both teachers and administrators, that will strengthen the link between student growth and evaluations of educator performance by:
 - Re-defining the student improvement component of the Delaware Performance Appraisal System ("DPAS II") to require measurement of student growth, benchmarked against standards to be set by the Secretary after consultation with various stakeholders;
 - Changing the current DPAS II rating system so that educators must earn a Satisfactory rating on the student growth evaluation to receive an overall "Effective" rating. In addition, change the rating system so that educators who

earn a Satisfactory rating on the student growth evaluation cannot be rated “Ineffective;” and

- Requiring schools to provide a mentor or instructional coach to teachers who do not receive an "Effective" rating as part of their improvement plan.
- Work with stakeholders to identify appropriate student growth measurements, to ensure that appropriate levels of growth within the relevant school year are being measured for teacher evaluation purposes.
- Add to the evaluation system a new “Highly Effective” rating for outstanding educators.
- Require novice teachers to show appropriate levels of student growth among their students prior to offering continuing licenses and tenure protections to those teachers.
- Provide school leaders with additional training on performing teacher assessments.
- Implement certification program for professional development courses, requiring that state or federally funded programs meet National Staff Development Council requirements and be related to the State and school strategic plans.
- Require that professional development courses taken by educators be related to areas of improvement identified by the educator’s latest assessment.

Ensure Equitable Distribution of Teachers across Delaware Schools

- Build on the Teach for America program and other alternative certification processes to enhance teacher quality at challenging schools.
- Provide performance incentives for highly effective teachers choosing to work in critical areas or challenging schools.
- Provide hiring incentives for teachers choosing to work in critical areas and challenging schools.
- Collect data from districts regarding distribution of teachers based on the teachers’ assessment ratings.
- Explore other means of attracting teachers to high needs subjects and schools, including working with local colleges to better prepare aspiring teachers for work in those areas.

Effective Use of Longitudinal Data Systems: “Design and implement Pre-K to College and Career data systems that track progress and foster continuous improvement.”

Delaware will use the data we collect about students throughout their education careers to support decision-making in the classroom and to determine what teaching methods, teachers and schools are effectively educating students. Delaware’s education community will:

- Train educators to use Delaware’s highly-rated longitudinal data system to its fullest potential.
 - Teachers, students, and parents can use data to provide continual feedback on how students are progressing, thereby allowing targeted opportunities for improvement throughout the school year.
 - Educators can use data system not only to measure individual student performance but also to measure areas of strength and weakness across an entire class, so educators can identify areas needing remediation class wide.
 - The data system can be used proactively to identify leading indicators for at-risk students, so that educators can be aware, for example, of students who may be at-risk of dropping out of school.
- Build on the current data system to permit cross-agency sharing to:
 - Assist in ensuring college and workforce success;
 - Provide teachers with key non-academic indicators, including attendance, mobility, and social services information;
 - Provide parents and students with access to data systems to provide linkages to assist with college and workforce information; and
 - Provide rich opportunities for outside research on education programs.
- Build a data governance process to ensure appropriate sharing of information when linking early learning, K-12, postsecondary, workforce, and social services data.
- Use the data system as a repository of instructional information and materials, which teachers can store and retrieve as needed for planning purposes.
- Build capacity in the Department of Education to use the data system for programmatic evaluation, to identify elements – such as scheduling and instructional changes – that have led to increased student performance.

Turning Around Persistently Low-Performing Schools: “Provide intensive support and effective interventions to turn around the lowest performing schools and ensure optimal student learning and growth.”

Approximately 40,000 Delaware students are in schools that did not meet targets for educational progress in 2008-09. Of those, 26,000 are in schools that have not made their targets for at least five consecutive years. Delaware must do more to target those schools needing assistance so that all of Delaware’s children receive the opportunity to succeed.

By capitalizing on tens of millions of dollars that have potentially been made available by the federal government for this purpose, Delaware’s education community will:

- Provide supports and flexibility to schools that have not met targets for educational progress in an area for at least two years. The Department will provide a school support team and work with the district to create an improvement plan that may include increased use of community partnerships and supplemental services for students, professional development and mentoring, use of family crisis therapists, and technical assistance. The Department will offer districts the opportunity to implement performance incentives to attract and retain effective teachers and principals.
- Expand supports and evaluate more aggressive reforms for schools that continue not to make educational progress. Schools that do not make educational progress in an area for three or more years will work with the district and the Department to implement a reform plan that may include replacing school leadership and/or select staff, providing outside expertise to advise the school, decreasing management authority at the school level, and implementing scheduling changes to increase teacher collaboration time and extend learning time. The district may also choose to institute flexible funding for the school, with performance incentives for effective teachers and school leaders.
- Pursue more aggressive reform in those schools that have shown a sustained inability to make educational progress. Districts with such schools will be required to make fundamental changes in the school, which may include closing the school, converting the school to a charter school, contracting with a management company to manage the school, or other major restructuring efforts that will vary depending on the school’s particular circumstances.
- Schools not meeting educational targets but whose students are showing growth will have more latitude, while schools not showing progress will face more prescriptive options, such as requiring new school leadership, instructional reform and extended learning time.
- Develop a "Partnership Zone" program in which a limited number of schools that have been well below performance targets for several years will partner with the district and the Department to chart a new course for achieving student success. At the schools, the Department and the district will negotiate and enter an agreement on how to turn that school around. Those agreements will require major changes in the school – such as reorganization of school leadership, redistributing educators to use them most effectively, financial incentives for teachers who join the school or choose to stay at the

school, specialized educator training, and allowing new administrators to have critical flexibilities over budgeting and staff with appropriate oversight. Districts will also have the option of restarting the school as a charter school, contracting with an outside management organization, or closing the school. Changes implicating collective bargaining protections would be negotiated with the local bargaining unit, and the Secretary of Education would be empowered to resolve such disputes.