

# L. Profiles of Educators in the Delaware Talent Cooperative

## Profiles of Educators in the Delaware Talent Cooperative



**Ms. Ashley Sorenson** is a fifth year educator at **Howard High School of Technology** in Wilmington, DE. Ashley, Howard's 2014-15 Teacher of the Year, is a member of Cohort II of the Delaware Talent Cooperative (DTC or Co-Op).

After earning her undergraduate degree at the University of Wisconsin, Ashley joined Teach For America and began teaching biology at Howard High – eventually growing to serve as Science Department Chair. Two years ago, Ashley and a colleague created the College Access Program with a group of sophomores set to graduate this year. The program now serves 100 students in grades 9-12 and is embedded within the school day. Students are assigned mentors through a partnership with the FirstGEN network. The program includes, assigned mentors, college research, interview/application skill development, college tours, and much more. Ashley's program was awarded a \$36,500 College Access Challenge Grant in 2013-2014 to expand its reach and resources. The program has also recently received an additional \$6,500 to assist with scaling its impact.

After her time as a Teach for America Corps Member came to an end, Ashley committed to remaining at Howard because she saw a real opportunity to positively affect change. In 2013, Ashley joined the Delaware Talent Cooperative and earned a Retention award for her achieved excellence and continued commitment to serving the Howard community. In her current position as Instruction Technology Coach, Ashley is the champion of all educational technology based initiatives, such as the 1:1 iPad program. She has stated that the professional development she has received through the Co-Op as well as the internal support and best-practice centered culture created by like-minded DTC educators in her building have been invaluable.

As part of Cohort III, **Mr. Doug Backus** is one of the Delaware Talent Cooperative's newest members. In less than a year at **Positive Outcomes Charter School**, he is already deeply embedded into the POCS Community. Doug is currently teaching math while serving as an advisor to the entire mathematics department.



After attending State University of New York – Potsdam and Wilmington University for his Bachelor's and Master's respectively, Doug was a teacher and football coach at Woodbridge Middle School in Delaware for eleven years. It was during his tenure at Woodbridge when Doug began to be recognized by his students and peers for his leadership and professional excellence in the classroom. After being named Middle School Teacher of the Year in 2010 and earning a rating of "Highly Effective" on DPAS-II educator evaluation in 2013-2014, Doug sought out the Delaware Talent Cooperative for a new challenge.

Upon his acceptance into the DTC, Doug transferred from Woodbridge and began teaching at Positive Outcomes Charter School. Doug says he enjoys the daily challenges and unpredictability he faces at POCS. He relishes the small class sizes because it affords him the opportunity to really connect with his students. Affectionately known as "Coach," by his students it has become evident that they view him as a trustworthy source of social and academic enlightenment.

Highlights of Doug's DTC experience so far include receiving heartfelt letters from parents and students attesting to the difference he is making. He also values the professional development sessions during which he gets to learn best practices and collaborate with other DTC educators.



**Ms. Henrietta O'Neill** brings to the Delaware Talent Cooperative's Cohort III nearly two decades of classroom experience and knowledge. During the early part of Henrietta's teaching career she was a pre-school teacher in Wilmington, DE. After earning her Bachelor of Science at Wilmington University in 2004, she taught in the Brandywine Specialized Autism Program at Darley Road Elementary

School. When Darley Road closed in 2008, Henrietta was hired to teach third grade at Claymont, but due to a reduction in force was assigned to Mount Pleasant Elementary as a fifth grade teacher. Despite the uncertainty around her, Henrietta remained committed to building strong relationships with the students and their families. Her hard work resulted in Henrietta earning ratings of "Exceeds and Highly Effective" with 100% of her students meeting the benchmark for Reading and Math in the 2012-2013 school year.

Henrietta's passion to help close the achievement gap coupled with her proven effectiveness in the classroom made her a great fit for the Delaware Talent Cooperative. As a 2014 Attraction Award recipient, she is currently teaching fifth grade at **Harlan Elementary School**. Since her arrival, she has become an integral part of the faculty at Harlan. Her participation in focus groups and DTC feedback sessions have been paramount in the further development and augmenting the overall impact of the Co-Op.

**Ms. Phyllis Wooley-Roy** is a member of Cohort II of the Co-Op and a recipient of a Delaware Talent Cooperative Retention Award. Phyllis has epitomized the passion, zeal, and effectiveness for educating the high-need school populations the DTC values.



Phyllis had a very successful career as a marketing executive for major corporations including Colgate and AstraZeneca. During her time in the corporate world she would volunteer at high-need schools. She was moved by these students' lack of access to a quality education, so much so that she decided to become an agent of change. Phyllis handed in her corporate resignation and enrolled in the Master of Education program at Wilmington University. Upon completion of her Master's program Phyllis was hired at Harlan Elementary to teach 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Her methods, rooted in her belief that "students will rise to the standards you (the teacher) set," showed their effectiveness immediately. Her students at Harlan showed so much improvement she was moved to Lombardi Elementary where she produced the same results. Her students reading and math levels improved over 30% during her first year of instruction.

When Phyllis joined the Co-Op she was able to transfer back to **Harlan Elementary School** where she is currently teaching 4<sup>th</sup> grade. She continues to strive to push many students who are well below the reading and writing standards for 4<sup>th</sup> grade up to and above grade-level.