

REVISITING THE VISION, RENEWING THE COMMITMENT

Education Summit: Summary and Recommendations



Delaware State Board of Education
February 2001

State Board of Education

Joseph A. Pika, Ph.D., *President*

Jean W. Allen, *Vice President*

Mary B. Graham, Esq.

John W. Jardine, Jr.

Dennis J. Savage

Claibourne D. Smith, Ph.D.

John G. Townsend Building

401 Federal St., Suite #2

Dover, DE 19901

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The members of the State Board of Education wish to acknowledge the leadership of Dr. James L. Spartz, President of the Delaware State Board of Education from 1997-2000. Dr. Spartz served as the convener for the November 2000 Education Summit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	ii
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
SUMMIT PROCEEDINGS.....	3
SUMMIT FINDINGS.....	5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	8

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Delaware State Board of Education convened a statewide Education Summit at Clayton Hall in Newark, Delaware on November 13, 2000. The Summit was co-sponsored by all the major education partner groups in the state.

The goals for the Summit established by the State Board and its partners:

- Reaffirm the original goals of New Directions;
- Renew the partnerships forged under New Directions;
- Begin the development of a plan for the personnel, financial, and building resources necessary to implement standards-based reform; and
- Recognize and celebrate the very significant education reform accomplishments that have taken place to date.

Discussions at the Summit among education stakeholders made it clear that all the stakeholders are committed to education reform and to providing the maximum opportunity to learn for all of Delaware's students. The discussions brought to the forefront the critical issues and challenges which must be met as Delaware enters the next decade of education reform.

Major recommendations from the Summit Stakeholder Groups

1. Maintain the focus on teaching and learning.
2. Attract and retain qualified teachers.
3. Provide quality professional development.
4. Provide adequate time for collaboration, professional development, and planning.
5. Ensure accurate, timely, and effective communications about the reform.
6. Assure equitable funding for all school districts and schools.
7. Expand preschool education opportunities.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The State Board of Education endorses the recommendations which came from Delaware's education partners at the Summit. The participants focused on areas that must be addressed for education reform to continue on its successful path in our state. Based on the discussions at the Summit and the State Board's stated goals for 1998-2003, the Board urges that the following policy actions be considered:

1. Institute a moratorium on new education initiatives that distract from the current reform agenda.
2. Establish and fund a statewide program to recruit and retain qualified educators.
3. Assure that professional development programs place a priority on helping both teachers and administrators develop the skills they need in an accountability system.
4. Implement an effective plan to ensure that all schools have the resources and support needed to meet the requirements of the accountability system.
5. Expand quality preschool programs to ensure that more students entering kindergarten are ready to learn.

INTRODUCTION

Delaware's education system underwent enormous change during 1999 and 2000. Debates raged over professional and student accountability. Relationships among and between the various public education partner groups became strained. With change proceeding on all fronts simultaneously, all groups interested in education confronted the task of making the pieces fit together. There was a danger that the original purpose of the reform—improving student performance—would be forgotten and the momentum for reform would falter.

In this context, the State Board of Education convened a statewide Education Summit designed to keep the reform effort moving forward. Every group invited by the Board to co-sponsor this effort agreed to do so. The Partner Groups included:

- Business/Public Education Council
- Delaware Advisory Council on Career and Vocational Education
- Delaware Association of School Administrators
- Delaware Chief School Officers Association
- Delaware Congress of Parents and Teachers
- Delaware Department of Education
- Delaware School Boards Association
- Delaware State Education Association
- Delaware State Parent Advisory Council
- Delaware State University
- Delaware Teachers of the Year
- University of Delaware

At its planning meetings, the group representatives agreed on the goals for the Summit:

- Reaffirm the original goals of New Directions;
- Renew the partnerships forged under New Directions;

- Begin the development of a plan for the personnel, financial, and building resources necessary to continue to implement standards-based reform; and
- Recognize and celebrate the very significant education reform accomplishments that have taken place to date.

Key to the committee's planning was the recognition that students need to stand at the center of the education reform efforts. This perspective is prominent in recent research on reform, captured in the concept **opportunity to learn** (OTL). In conjunction with the Summit, the Research and Development Center at the University of Delaware developed a policy brief focused on opportunity to learn. This brief states in part:

Accountability is one of the top priorities on educational agendas across the nation....With increased expectations for student performance comes the obligation of providing students with adequate "opportunities to learn".

It seemed clear to the committee that meeting this obligation will require a joint effort of all stakeholders. As Harvard professor Richard Elmore indicates, "Accountability is best viewed as a contract among all stakeholders in which every demand for increased performance carries with it an equal obligation on the part of the group making the demand to provide the necessary support to meet the higher standards".

The policy brief continued:

In recent policy discussions, OTL has come to refer not only to the overlap between what has been taught and what is tested, but to a more proactive concern with **providing appropriate learning opportunities for all groups of students** (emphasis added). Moreover, in standards-based reform, OTL has been defined as "**what the education system does to enable students to meet the expectations set by the content and performance standards.**" (The entire education policy brief, Opportunity to Learn, can be found in Appendix C of this document.

The Summit reminded all participants of the centrality of students in all aspects of the reform effort.

SUMMIT PROCEEDINGS

The State Board of Education's Summit was entitled "Revisiting the Vision, Renewing the Commitment" and was held on Monday, November 13, 2000 at Clayton Hall in Newark Delaware. More than 200 individuals registered. They represented all of the various partner groups and included members of the General Assembly, representatives from the Governor-elect's Office, Governor Carper and Congressman Castle. Michael Cohen, U.S. Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, was the keynote speaker. He congratulated the attendees for the accomplishments of Delaware's reform effort to date. Participants received a variety of materials including the OTL policy brief and statements from each of the partner groups. These statements can be found in Appendix A.

The format of the meeting was designed to allow the maximum amount of guided group discussion around key issues. In the morning mixed groups of 20-22 participants, representing all the education stakeholders and assisted by facilitators, recorders, and timekeepers, discussed and prioritized the issues they thought the individual partner groups should focus on to maximize the opportunity to learn for all students. During the afternoon discussion period, homogeneous groups of 15-30 participants, representing individuals of each of the stakeholder groups, and again using facilitators, recorders and timekeepers, focused on the priorities identified for their stakeholder group earlier in the day. They discussed what was needed to accomplish the priorities and "how we would know we are making progress toward these goals."

At the conclusion of the Summit, the comments recorded in the morning and afternoon sessions were compiled and reviewed. These compilations are contained in Appendix B.

Time was also provided to celebrate the accomplishments of Delaware's education reform efforts. A time line of the first ten years of reform was provided and attendees were encouraged to reflect on the contributions they had made to bring the reform from vision to reality. Summit participants were reminded that through the combined efforts of educators, parents, business and community members, the Department of Education, the legislature and the governor's office, Delaware has:

- Adopted core academic standards in reading, writing, math, science and social studies;
- Assessed student achievement and progress in relation to the core standards;
- Established extra time programs to help students performing below standard in the areas of reading, writing and math;
- Adopted content standards in the areas of visual and performing arts, technology, health and wellness, agriscience, foreign language, functional life skills, and business, finance and marketing;
- Developed the framework for district, school, teacher and student accountability;
- Established a system of recognitions and rewards for high achieving students, teachers, schools and districts;
- Increased starting pay and created salary incentives for improvements in teachers' skills and knowledge;
- Launched expanded programs in mentoring and professional development for teachers and administrators; and
- Established a statewide school discipline program.

SUMMIT FINDINGS

In the afternoon discussion sessions, groups of teachers, parents, administrators, policymakers, representatives from higher education, and representatives from business and the community each discussed their group's priorities for maximizing the opportunity to learn for all students

The **teachers** group chose two priorities, saying that teachers need to be able to plan and prepare for students more intentionally and that teachers need more quality professional development. They cited a variety of needs to help them meet these goals including more time during the day to work with other teachers and the use of 12 month contracts and extended paid days without students. They also felt that professional development should be focused on the Delaware content standards and offered within a reasonable distance for teachers to attend.

Parent participants were clear about their priorities. They felt the state should provide quality preschools for more children to prepare them to enter school ready to learn. In addition they believe that all parents should do their part at home by supporting education and by caring for their children. They agreed that parents should be informed about and involved with their children's schools and their education programs. They also suggested that there needs to be more open communication between schools and parents and that parents seek to become more involved with parent organizations that support parents and education.

The **administrator** groups agreed that for administrators to maximize the opportunity to learn for all students they need to focus on emphasizing instructional

leadership as compared to management. They also agreed that they must keep their vision on student performance and student success and participate actively in professional development. To accomplish these goals they cited a variety of needs including more resources for staff recruitment and quality support staffs, as well as more time for interaction with teachers and collaboration with other administrators. They also cited the need for a coordinated system of data collection which could be easily communicated and provide access to good data for decision making.

Administrators believe that the vision for student success needs to be clearly articulated, based on multiple measures, and supported by all stakeholders. They are concerned about a narrow focus for success as opposed to a balanced focus which takes in many factors. They also believe that it is important for all stakeholders to feel responsibility for student success. Finally, they believe that there needs to be more collaboration in the system and more support for professional educators.

The **policymakers** group, including school board members and legislators, listed four priorities for things they could do to improve student learning. They felt they could reexamine and improve how schools are funded, seeking an emphasis on equity for all students. They also thought it was important to work to improve evaluation and professional development programs for all educators, as well as enhancing recruitment and retention programs for teachers and other educators. In addition, they agreed on a goal to expand preschool and early childhood programs in order to increase children's readiness to learn when entering school. Finally, policymakers supported promoting systemic change toward decentralization of the education system.

Representatives of **higher education** focused on all areas of educator training including preservice training for teachers, training for administrators, and professional development for all educators. Among other ways to improve preservice training they recommended an examination of student teaching programs and the establishment of professional development schools. For administrator training they felt it was important to establish nonprofit course certification programs and to place an emphasis on helping administrators shift from operational managers to instructional leaders. They agreed that there needs to be more effective statewide coordination and delivery of professional development which focuses on the state content standards and other important areas such as student diversity.

The **business and community** member group said they could support student learning through three broad avenues. In general they supported increased funding for education with an emphasis on equal funding across districts. They also felt that business could play a stronger role in supporting high standards by requesting student transcripts when hiring, sharing resources with schools, and providing release time for working parents to visit their children's schools. In addition, the business and community members thought that they could bring a range of services and programs to schools and could help maintain high expectations for academic standards by working closely with administrators and teachers.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Reform in Delaware stands at a critical juncture. As the State Board of Education asserted in their Partner statement:

Ten years of work by hundreds of educational professionals, community members and policy makers across two governorships has produced a bipartisan framework for progress. But the tasks ahead are numerous and complex. Critical pieces of the reform agenda must be implemented and these efforts must be coordinated across districts, across schools, across classrooms. To succeed in this effort, Delaware must:

- maintain a sustained focus on the original goal of reform improving the academic achievement of all students;
- foster energetic, enabling leaders at all levels of the system;
- ensure highly effective teaching in every classroom;
- provide resources necessary for the tasks to be completed;
- engender cooperation from all stakeholders;
- avoid the temptation to redirect efforts toward projects tangential to the central goal.

Discussions at the Summit among education stakeholders made it clear that all the stakeholders are committed to education reform and to providing the maximum opportunity to learn for all of Delaware's students. The discussions also brought to the forefront the critical issues and challenges which must be met as Delaware enters the next decade of education reform.

The major recommendations from the Summit are:

1. Maintain the Focus on Teaching and Learning

Maintaining focus on teaching and learning is critical to the success of education reform in Delaware. Educators conveyed a consistent message---Reduce the extraneous noise in the system and help us to put the pieces of reform together into a coherent strategy that supports teaching and learning. All groups recognize the importance of refining policies and programs now in place, but there is a widespread sense of overload.

Undertaking major new initiatives threatens to push many over the edge. Stakeholders also want greater clarity about their roles and the expectations they are to meet.

2. Attract and Retain Qualified Teachers

In order for students to achieve at high levels and have the maximum opportunity to learn, it is imperative to have a plan to attract and retain qualified teachers. Policymakers at the Summit supported a significant increase in funding for teacher induction programs. While Delaware has done some work in this area, our “lead” mentors often also have full time classroom responsibilities. Connecticut’s model was one of those discussed that has proven to be very effective in training, supporting and retaining highly qualified staff. Policymakers urged the state to consider offering signing bonuses for teachers as well as supporting them by paying for such things as moving expenses and security deposits. The key to retaining quality teachers is to provide the supports and resources that teachers need to do their job well including time, training and working conditions.

3. Provide Quality Professional Development

Quality professional development for all educators is critical to the success of education reform.. Nearly every stakeholder group at the Summit spoke to this need. While the State and individual districts have made great strides in this area, it is clear that more needs to be done. A coordinated approach to professional development must be implemented which focuses on the issues of providing the time and resources necessary

to develop and maintain a well trained professional work force. In order to be successful, it must be on going and adhere to the highest standards for professional development.

4. Provide Adequate Time for Collaboration, Professional Development, and Planning

Another important challenge for the system is to find the time that educators need to accomplish the many tasks before them. The state has moved to provide the time for professional development by adding additional days to the teacher work year, and many districts have modified their calendars to free up more time for staff training. Despite these positive steps, teachers still need more time to plan and collaborate---essential steps to integrate curriculum, understand the content standards, and design instruction to meet student needs. Principals feel caught between their role as instructional leaders and their role as building managers and the lack of time to do both. They also are looking for time to pursue professional development and training targeted for administrators. Other stakeholder groups spoke about the need for time in other areas. Parents want educators to have time to communicate effectively with families.

5. Ensure Accurate, Timely, and Effective Communication about the Reform

Many of the stakeholders cited the need for better communication, both within the education community and with the community at large, as an important area that needs attention in order to move forward and build the broad based support required to continue the reform effort. The need for accurate, timely and effective communication cannot be overstated.

6. Assure Equitable Funding for All School Districts and Schools

A number of groups underscored the need to address inequitable funding among districts and in educator salaries. Critical to Delaware's ability to attract and retain quality educators will be its ability to provide them with competitive salaries and optimum working conditions. Recent changes in the salary system made progress in raising starting salaries but did not address cross-district differences. In addition, as the state moves toward implementing accountability for students, educators, schools, and districts, the issue of equitable funding for districts and schools becomes a paramount concern with a direct impact on students' opportunity to learn

7. Expand Preschool Education Opportunities

A focus on preschool education was an important finding from the Summit. Both parents and policymakers addressed the need to expand preschool and early childhood programs. Delaware has focused on this area for several years providing head start programs for all 4 year olds living at 100% of the poverty level, as well as many other supports for families of young children. Discussions at the Summit seem to indicate that there is still a need to do more for children of preschool age, and current research on brain development and early learning support this notion.

There will be many challenges ahead as Delaware moves down the path of education reform. Perhaps the greatest challenge will be to provide the maximum opportunity to learn for all of Delaware's students. The partners who gathered at the Education Summit have focused on the areas which must be addressed to ensure success

for Delaware's students now and in the future. These partners have demonstrated their commitment to work together to achieve the State Board of Education's vision for education reform: **All children will reach their full potential and be able to lead full and productive lives.**

For any Appendices, please contact the State Board of Education at (302) 739-4603.