Rodel
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CHANGES EVERYTHING

Delaware Educator Recommendations
Reopening Schools Working Groups
June 2020

Background
The Rodel Teacher Network is composed of local teacher leaders dedicated to finding solutions, improving their craft, and leveraging their voices for the benefit of all students. Members represent all three counties, a variety of grade levels and subject areas, and bring a broad cross-section of leadership perspectives. Rodel convened the first Rodel Teacher Council, as it was referred to then, in 2013 to represent the diversity of the local teaching force, provide a venue for teachers to weigh in on important issues affecting their work, inform Rodel on policy priorities, and help set the course for education improvement in Delaware.

This memo is authored by Rodel Teacher Network members and shares their perspectives on how the state of Delaware can strengthen our schools. These recommendations are based on our experiences and research, as well as previously authored policy briefs. As the Department of Education, district and charter leaders plan for the future of education and anticipate reopening school in 2020, we urge them to take the opportunity presented by the COVID-19 crisis and enact recommendations that make sense for our students and schools need now more than ever.

Educator Perspectives through COVID-19
As educators, we are encouraged by all the hard work of our peers and leaders over the past few months. We are optimistic we can build upon all that we have learned through these months of remote learning to do even better for our school staff, students, and families for the coming school year. We are eager to offer our ideas as the state develops a framework and local education agencies develop their own plans for how to handle the coming school year.

We know COVID-19 has created unprecedented challenges and put greater emphasis on existing challenges. However, there is an opportunity and an urgency to build upon the innovative and engaging practices happening in pockets across the state and support schools and educators to **personalize academic, social, and emotional supports for students, their families, our peers, as well as us, as educators.**

It is through this lens that we offer the following recommendations, grounded in the Blueprint on Personalized Learning in Delaware, Educators Speak Up: Social and Emotional Learning in Delaware, and other policy briefs previously developed by educators on the Rodel Teacher Network, and revisited now in light of all we are experiencing.

We know there are many unknowns including whether schools will be open for in person instruction, closed, or some hybrid. Regardless of which scenario or combination of scenarios play out, these recommendations and opportunities can be implemented— many of them in the coming year, some will take longer. We seek to inform immediate decision-making as well as long term planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE AND LOCAL LEADERS TO PURSUE

1. **Technology Infrastructure**
   Why now: In order for students to direct their own learning, it is crucial that school AND home learning environments have consistent broadband access and capacity for all learners. A robust technology infrastructure that supports personalized learning includes high-speed, wireless Internet, cloud-based applications to support and manage learning, and devices that give students and teachers the freedom to learn and teach.

   A. **The Department of Technology and Information (DTI), Department of Education (DDOE) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs),** which includes districts and charter schools) should come together and purchase services from broadband providers at a steeply discounted rate, enabling access to all students and educators. We applaud the work underway already, at least, in part through over $40 million dollars in federal CARES Act funding. We encourage sustaining the access year round and during after school hours regardless of school opening.
   B. The **DDOE and LEAs** should create and utilize mass-purchasing collaborative agreements that promote savings on technology purchases, for example student and educator devices.
   C. As a short-term solution until A and B are implemented, **DDOE and LEAs** should build on the creative partnerships already underway to provide hot spots to individual students/families and to coordinate with local government, libraries, community centers to provide safe, content-filtered access to students all day and year.
   D. **DOE** should invest in state and regional help desks because this is new to all of us. Parents, students, and teachers need help sometimes accessing the content and navigating broadband access**.**

2. **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Supports**
   Why now: As educators, we recognize the importance of developing the whole child—not just their English and math skills, but also their ability to communicate, collaborate, set personal goals, and empathize. And in addition to student SEL, 38% of educators in a recent Rodel survey called for training and support for educator stress and trauma stemming from the pandemic.

A. **DDOE and LEAs** should foster a culture that integrates student agency and supports students' social emotional development by providing professional development opportunities to educators and authentic engagement with students and families. Ultimately, opportunities to demonstrate social emotional development should be incorporated into teaching and learning. Creative solutions will have to be employed for remote learning—and these have included one-on–one check-ins over virtual calls, explicit SEL discussions or activities, school communication platforms like Class Dojo, online sessions to support family wellbeing or coach them on SEL strategies, educator self-care and compiling a hub of SEL and community resources.

B. **The DDOE, LEAs**, and **State SEL Collaborative** partners should continue working to develop a common language for SEL competencies in Delaware and resources for educators, districts and charters, and community agencies about how to intentionally integrate social, emotional, and academic development. They should continue to engage educators as competencies are implemented.

C. **LEAs** can explore with educators the recommendations they believe will be effective, such as additional training, classroom strategies, community supports, and family engagement strategies.

3. **Innovative, Differentiated Educator Roles**
Why now: A truly personalized learning environment depends on shifting the traditional roles of educators—from creating teams of educators, to taking on new roles like "e-learning mentors," instructional strategy coaches, evaluators, and more.

A. **DDOE** should allow **LEAs** to apply for waivers to the teacher of record policy, providing oversight and support as needed as LEAs adopt innovative school models. Ultimately, the state should consider eliminating the teacher of record policy, recognizing the need for additional educator roles in a personalized, student-centered learning environment. **LEAs** should extend the reach of excellent teachers by redesigning the traditional role of the teacher and give teachers increased flexibility in how they address the individual needs of their students, coupled with support and training and increased collaboration/planning time. For example, educators may co-teach, share roles among a large group of students, or take on different responsibilities or number of students depending on in-person, remote and hybrid contexts.

B. The **DDOE** should offer waivers to allow **LEAs** to pilot a student-centered funding system aligned to the demands of truly personalized learning. Allocations should be responsive to individual students' needs, interests, and goals, not based on units. This could include resource allocation for students to access community programs and individualized educational opportunities based on their interests, needs, and goals. For example, particularly in this time when so many students have been out of

traditional school for months, some students may want to access online learning for a longer period, and some may be ready for higher education courses offered online or on campus.

4. **Mastery Or Competency-Based Learning**
Why now: When students advance from one grade level to the next based on their age, rather than on what they have learned, they are often unprepared for new academic content and/or experience gaps in their learning. Mastery or competency-based learning offers a better way to convey what students know and can do academically since it provides educators, students, and families a clearer picture of academic progress, and where a student might need extra help. It can also help mitigate and even prevent gaps in learning from developing in the first place.

A. To support the transition to mastery-based learning, **DDOE** should develop:
   - Waiver options, pilot programs, and/or supports for schools, districts and charters to allow students to progress through content based on mastery instead of seat-time or clock hours. For example, allowing students to move on to a new math subject once they have demonstrated competency on the standards (e.g. from Pre-Algebra to Algebra)
   - A statewide database for educators of standards-based assessments, curriculum units and model lessons, and other online or blended learning materials, accessed via Schoology, Delaware's learning management system. There is a plethora of content on the internet, so it will be important for these tools to be curated by great Delaware teachers. For example, provide educator-developed model lessons, as the state did with the Recommended Curriculum. The lessons developed by BRINC and other educators could be a good starting place for review by content expert peers

   For example, Las Americas ASPIRA Academy uses competency-based learning to track student growth in subjects including reading. In addition, several schools and districts, including Appoquinimink and Brandywine School District, are implementing standards-based grading, in academics and SEL.

B. **LEAs** should (with DDOE support) build on existing standards-based grading initiatives and the transition to mastery-based learning through a pilot program. Pilot LEAs should:
   - Engage students, families, and educators in the transition
   - Ensure the process is transparent, rigorous, and equitable
   - Ensure alignment with standards
   - Develop guidelines for staff to assess digital and other tools
   - Offer training to staff, parents, and students

5. **Support and Outreach to All Students, Especially High Needs Students**
   Why now: All students deserve access to a high-quality educational program that meets their specific needs. This includes special education students, English learners, gifted and talented students, and low-income students. Despite the best attempts of educators, we know not all students were engaged consistently since remote learning began.

   A. Parents, students, educators, and the public need timely, relevant and useful information about student performance —on assessments and other data like engagement—to make student-centered decisions. **The DDOE and LEAs** should ensure that all student needs are met using student-centered approaches and a meaningful accountability system, including transparent reporting of student engagement and needs. State-recommended diagnostic tools to assess where students return to school and instructional approaches to acceleration, not remediation, will be helpful to guide district and charter efforts. Guidance on reaching and supporting any hard-to-reach families/students should be provided.

   B. **DDOE and LEAs** should explore personalized learning plans for students, which similar to a portfolio, utilize technology to capture where a student begins and their achievement of mastery along a continuum, and is used to chart a path for how students will achieve their goals. This approach can be used to create authentic real-world engaging experiences for students.

   C. **DDOE and LEAS should provide** guidance and support to meeting specific special learning needs for students, such as Individualized Education Program (IEPs) and translation services for non-English speaking families. In a recent Rodel survey, 50% of respondents identified this additional support as critical.

6. **Personalized Teacher Supports and Training**
   Why now: Any teacher will tell you that all students have different strengths and learn in different ways. Teachers are no different. Thirty percent of educators responding to a recent survey from Rodel called for training and supports for personalizing instruction, digital curriculum creation and delivery, open education resources, and more. We must leverage technology and other tools to personalize professional development to be more responsive to educators' individual goals and those of their schools, districts or charter. The transition this past spring to all remote learning was abrupt. Now, we need to plan and prepare.

   A. **DDOE** should build upon existing online professional learning opportunities and recent pilots to create a system of microcredentials allowing educators to demonstrate mastery of skills relevant to their practice. The system should provide opportunities for educators to design and pilot microcredentials with and for their peers. Over time, this system could replace the current clock-hour professional development requirements for licensing. Currently, we hear educators want trainings on SEL, trauma, mindfulness, mastery and competency-based learning,

blended learning and technology platforms, special education in remote settings, English learner supports in remote settings, and other topics.

B. **Schools, districts, charters and DDOE** should collaborate to ensure that Delaware's professional development ecosystem is user-friendly and cohesive, allowing individual educators to access content tailored to their needs and interests. This could include:
- Building on the use of adaptive online platforms to support content delivery
- Providing opportunities for educators to design and lead professional development as well as provide meaningful feedback on existing professional development opportunities
- Encouraging partnerships among schools, districts and charters to offer professional development to more educators at scale, and including school wide staff or parents/families when appropriate

C. Teachers, **DDOE, LEAs**, and college and university leaders should collaborate to prepare student educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to teach in a student-centered environment. All new educators need training in blended and personalized learning and this should include co-teaching experience with cooperating educators in which they get practice delivering blended and personalized learning. The Professional Standards Board, as they review and approve program requirements, should consider adopting requirements in these areas.

7. **Educator Involvement**
Why now: Delaware's educators have front-line expertise when it comes to the needs of the students and families they serve. The development of local and state plans for reopening is an opportunity to engage with educators and have their ideas, feedback, and professional knowledge inform the path forward.

A. State leaders should intentionally solicit feedback from educators on a draft state framework before it is finalized. **If you would like to talk further with any of us about our insights as an educator please contact us.**

B. Local leaders can:
- Establish planning committees that include teacher participation to ensure we design thoughtful learning environments that work for students and educators while still being CDC compliant
- Allow teachers to weigh in on Title I committees and other efforts to make sure our most vulnerable students get the extra support they will need
- Seek teacher input using multiple tools such as feedback through a website, email, or Schoology discussion board etc., as well as traditional forms (surveys and meetings)

We look forward to working with leaders to implement these recommendations. If you would like to talk further with us, please do not hesitate to reach out to us individually or
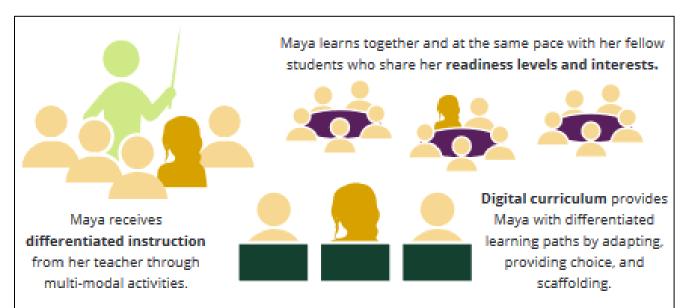
through info@rodelde.org. You can read more about the Rodel Teacher Network here and read findings here from an education needs survey recently conducted by Rodel of 800+ Delawareans, of which 43% of respondents were educators.

This is a time like no other. This will take all of us—from those of us on the front lines to all those working to lead schools, districts, charters and the state. On behalf of our students, we stand with you in helping Delaware lead the way!

Signed,

Karen Eller	4th grade teacher	The Bancroft School, Christina School District
Kate Bowski	3rd grade teacher	Milton Elementary School, Cape Henlopen School District
Jessi Walsh	Kindergarten teacher	Gallaher Elementary, Christina School District
Lisa Schlater	Kindergarten teacher	Love Creek Elementary, Cape Henlopen School District
Rebecca Vitelli	Pre-Kindergarten teachers	Colonial Early Education Program, Colonial School District
Sherlynn Aurelio	Retired Educator	Colonial School District; Delaware State SEL Core Team
Lindsay Hudson-Hubbs	Special Education Teacher	G.W. Carver Academy, Indian River School District
Chantalle Ashford	English teacher	Indian River High School, Indian River School District
Kendra Moritz	2nd grade special education Teacher	Lorewood Grove Elementary School, Appoquinimink School District
Lisa Mims	5th grade teacher	Pleasantville Elementary School, Colonial School District
Kimberly Neal	Instructional Coach	Christina School District
Robyn Howton	AVID Coordinator/English Dept. Chair	Mt. Pleasant High School, Brandywine School District

APPENDIX

Maya learns together and at the same pace with her fellow students who share her **readiness levels and interests.**

Maya receives **differentiated instruction** from her teacher through multi-modal activities.

Digital curriculum provides Maya with differentiated learning paths by adapting, providing choice, and scaffolding.

This model, in which educators are facilitators and guides, requires school communities to rethink the traditional role of educators as, "sage on the stage."

52% of schools in Delaware are ready for digital learning today. To meet 2018 demand, the typical school district in Delaware will need to grow bandwidth at least threefold.[2]

One current barrier to many Delaware LEAs upgrading their broadband capacity is cost. In a 2016 survey of Delaware's LEA infrastructure, 84 percent of respondents indicated they would consider participating in a statewide collaborative to share the costs of updating broadband capacity. (Source: Education Technology Task Force Report)

How does broadband enable student-centered learning?

Several aspects of Maya's learning experience require access to high-speed broadband, including:

hello
你好

Personalized learning plan

Ongoing feedback and assessment

Online and distance learning

As more digital elements are integrated into a learning environment, and as more users join the same network, the greater the need for additional broadband capacity.

Educators overwhelmingly want more training, supports, and standards to better address SEL

55%

45% of educators did not feel their training adequately prepared them to address students' social and emotional learning.

51% indicating they were "very interested."

51%

Including pre-service college courses and in-service workshops or trainings.

However...

Still...

45%

97%

More than half of educators **(55%)** reported receiving training in SEL.

Educators of younger students were more likely to report receiving training than educators of middle and high school students.

Almost all educators (97%) indicated some level of interest in training on best practices in SEL.