

# EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT



Delaware  
Department of Education

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## A Framework for Delaware's ESSA Plan

In December 2015, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the main federal law governing funding of public education, as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA gives states more flexibility and provides more state and local control as well as the opportunity to advance Delaware's public schools by enabling all students to succeed. ESSA also requires states to have a plan for spending federal funds, for measuring the skills students learn, and for supporting students in making academic progress. Delaware's ESSA plan is an important component of Delaware's overall education system. The purpose of this document is to show how Delaware's ESSA plan fits into and supports the state's agenda of excellent public schools

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## Introduction to ESSA Framework

This framework document provides our stakeholders with an overview of how DDOE sees the opportunities within ESSA fitting into the education vision. This document does not describe all of the responsibilities and work of the DDOE.

Delaware is committed to improving the education of all of its students. The First State has a long tradition of setting ambitious goals and working collaboratively to achieve those the goals. There are ongoing efforts to work together to improve the education system for all Delaware students, such as [Sustaining Early Success Delaware's Strategic Plan for a Comprehensive Early Childhood System](#), [Learning to Work Delaware Pathways](#), [Student Success 2025](#), [Delaware's Equity Plan for Providing Access to Excellent Educators for All](#), [English Learner Strategic Plan](#), and the Special Education Strategic Plan (currently being developed). At the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE), we are taking the opportunity to pull these efforts together, along with our plan for the Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA), to create a cohesive vision for our Delaware Public Education System.

Delaware's education community values high-quality education for all of our students and wants each student to reach his or her highest level of achievement. Our community wants all students to graduate with the skills to prepare them for life. The Delaware education system needs to have:

- Standards and curricula that will prepare students for success in college, career, and life;
- Assessments to measure their progress along the way;
- An accountability system that provides families and educators with information on how well districts and charter schools, that is local education agencies (LEAs), are educating their students; and
- What supports for students and schools help achieve their goals along the way.

### *Delaware Department of Education*

As an initial step in this process, the DDOE refined its vision, mission, and priorities. This work prepared DDOE for the opportunities available through ESSA.

**Our vision:** Every learner ready for success in college, career and life.

**Our mission:** To empower every learner with the highest quality education through shared leadership, innovative practices and exemplary services.

**Our priorities:**

- Engaged and informed families, schools, LEAs, communities, and other agencies
- Rigorous standards, instruction, and assessments
- High-quality early learning opportunities
- Equitable access to excellent educators
- Safe and healthy environments conducive to learning



## Every Student Succeeds Act

Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as the Every Student Succeeds Act in December 2015. ESSA provides federal funding for elementary and secondary education programs. The Act emphasizes rigorous academic standards, accountability, and equal access to college- and career-ready education programs for all students. It also provides states with greater flexibility, especially in the areas of accountability and school improvement, while maintaining an emphasis on student achievement for all students.

ESSA requires states to have a plan for spending federal funds, for measuring the skills students learn, and for supporting students in making academic progress. With Delaware's ESSA plan submitted to the U.S. Department of Education, DDOE is providing a broad context for the overall education vision and an understanding of how the ESSA plan supports our state's vision for public schools. The ESSA plan is intentionally high level to allow for flexibility and refinement through implementation.



## Engaged and Informed Families, Schools, Districts, Communities, and Other Agencies

Evidence supports that gaps in educational opportunity and achievement will only be fully remedied when those closest to low-income students, such as parents, families, and communities, are meaningfully engaged by their teachers, schools, and districts. The DDOE is proposing to use the family engagement definition developed in 2010 by the National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group (now the NAFSCE Policy Council) as a guide for establishing meaningful, impactful guidelines for parent and family engagement within our state's public schools. NAFSCE's definition (<http://nafsce.org/who-we-are/#dfe>) is:

- Family engagement is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and provide them with the supports they need to be actively included in supporting their children's learning and development.
- Family engagement is continuous across a child's life and entails enduring commitment by changing parent roles as children mature into young adulthood.
- Effective family engagement cuts across and reinforces learning in the multiple settings where children learn—at home, in early learning settings, in school, in out-of-school programs, and in the community.

The DDOE will promote high-impact parent, family, and community engagement that is collaborative, culturally competent, trauma-informed, and focused on supporting the whole child academically, socially, and emotionally.

### Parents, Family and Community Engagement

Parents, family, and community engagement is critical to the success of schools. Therefore, the DDOE intends to use funds from a variety of federal and state sources to promote high-impact parent, family, and community engagement that is collaborative, culturally competent, trauma-informed, and focused on supporting the whole child academically, socially, and emotionally. In addition, educators and their partners need clear statewide goals, measures, and data and effective supports to continue improving outcomes for all Delaware students.

The following sections provide information on DDOE resources and supports for informing and engaging our families, schools, districts, communities, and other agencies in this important work.

### ESSA Plan Development

Parents, families, educators, and community members have been engaged throughout the development of Delaware's ESSA plan. There were:

- ♦ 11 community meetings scheduled across the state with 175 participants, including 2 in Spanish with 40 participants
- ♦ 4 ESSA Advisory Committee meetings
- ♦ 25 stakeholder group meetings with over 800 participants
- ♦ 3 surveys with over 680 responses received
- ♦ 13 discussion groups meetings
- ♦ More than 140 emails with feedback
- ♦ ESSA website, providing resources, updates on progress and draft plans, and access to the feedback that was received

Engagement with parents, families, educators, and communities will continue as we develop reports and documents that will show how our schools are progressing.

## Long-Term Goals

Under ESSA, DDOE, with stakeholder engagement, has drafted long-term goals that are ambitious but achievable for ALL of our students. Delaware selected 2030 as the target date to achieve its long-term goals, because 2030 is the year students beginning kindergarten in the 2017-2018 school year will graduate from high school. This means the long-term goals will be reached by a peer group of students who have been educated in the Delaware public school system under the ESSA state plan, which also begins in the 2017-2018 school year.

DDOE has attempted to strike a balance between upholding our vision of high achievement for all while recognizing that our students come to us at different starting points. With annual reporting through school profiles and ratings in the Delaware School Success Framework (DSSF), parents, families and community members will know how their schools and LEAs are performing against these ambitious goals. Schools, LEAs, and the state will annually report performance outcomes compared to these goals as well as the DSSF and annual reporting through School Profiles. DDOE established long-term state goals for English language arts (ELA)/mathematics academic achievement, graduation rates, and English language proficiency (ELP). Performance on the statewide accountability test will be reported annually for each tested grade within each school for all students, which includes student subgroups of students with disabilities (SWD), English learners (ELs), low socioeconomic students, and students by race and ethnicity. Graduation rates will also be reported annually for the same groups of students. There are interim goals set for academic achievement located in Appendix A of the ESSA State Plan.

DDOE, with input from stakeholder groups, has developed goals that reduce the achievement gap by 50% for student subgroups. LEAs will develop goals using the same methodology used for determining state goals. As with the state goals, the LEA goals will be set based on their current achievement levels, and their progress will be monitored against their long-term goals for ELA/mathematics academic achievement, graduation rates, and ELP.

## Accountability System to Provide Information to Parents, Stakeholders, and Communities

Starting in summer 2014, the DDOE engaged with stakeholders across the state to devise a comprehensive and authentic structure for school and LEA performance that incorporates multiple academic and nonacademic measures related to college and career readiness for all students. DDOE will continue to implement the accountability system, known as the DSSF, which described in the textbox, to differentiate performance of all LEAs, elementary schools, and secondary schools. To aid in meaningful differentiation, ratings will be assigned at both the school and LEA levels and will be based on performance in each of five indicators. Student data for each indicator will be individually reported at the school and LEA levels and aggregated to generate a numeric score for each indicator. Each indicator contributes a weighted value toward the summative index score for the school that is then translated into an overall text-based identification (e.g., exceeds, meets, or meets few expectations). Terminology to be used for text-based identifications will be developed through stakeholder consultation. Summative index scores will be used to identify schools for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), while student subgroup performance will be used to

### DSSF

Under the school year 2015-2016 multiple-measures accountability system, schools and LEAs received ratings based on performance in each indicator area:

- ◆ Academic Achievement
- ◆ Growth
- ◆ On Track to Graduation
- ◆ College and Career Preparation

With the proposed ESSA refinements to the Delaware Schools Success Framework (DSSF), there are five indicator areas:

- ◆ Academic Achievement
- ◆ Academic Progress,
- ◆ School Quality/Student Success
- ◆ Graduation Rate
- ◆ Progress Toward English Language Proficiency

identify schools for Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI). Schools that do not fall into one of these two categories will be identified as “Other”. DDOE will develop final school support designation titles for CSI, TSI and “other” schools through stakeholder consultation. Multiple tiers of support will be provided to LEAs based on their performance and the school’s needs in order to foster continuous improvement.

DSSF applies to all Delaware charter schools as they are considered LEAs and will be included in the annual meaningful differentiation of all public schools. However, charter schools are held to additional levels of standards of accountability and transparency. The rigorous standards to which charter schools are held are established at the point of application for the charter school, continue through annual reporting of charter school performance, and enforced through both the formal review and five-year renewal processes as mandated by Delaware’s charter school law. Charter school performance is reported annually for each charter school.

Implementation of the revised DSSF system under ESSA will begin using data from the 2017-2018 school year. Feedback gathered throughout 2016 suggested two priorities—weighting student growth (how students’ academic progress grows over time) over absolute proficiency (students’ test scores) AND including a measurement of school quality and learning conditions. Consistent with ESSA’s requirement that academic indicators be given “substantial weight,” DDOE proposes the following weights for each indicator:

- Academic Achievement – 25%
- Academic Progress – 35%
- School Quality/Student Success – 20%
- Graduation Rate – 10%
- Progress Toward English Language Proficiency – 10%

With the proposed weights above, the public education accountability system meets the requirements of the ESSA law.

ESSA has given Delaware the opportunity to revisit the indicators included in its multiple-measures accountability system, which was developed with extensive stakeholder feedback during 2014 and 2015. The resulting list of proposed DSSF indicators reflects the feedback the DDOE received from our stakeholders over the last few months. Proposed changes include:

- *Growth methodology*: Extensive stakeholder feedback indicates that the accountability system should calculate and report on growth at the student level rather than at the aggregated school level. The current growth methodology does not support this approach. Therefore, a growth-to-standard index methodology is being considered and modeled using student-level data. This methodology measures the average percentage of growth target achieved for all students, based on the vertical scale scores of the state assessment. With this approach, students get “credit” for any growth up to and beyond the target, accounting for performance that exceeds the expectation.
- *Why attendance has been removed*: This metric is not research-based and did not contribute to the meaningful differentiation of schools. Rather, the majority of the feedback received from stakeholders indicated that a measure of chronic absenteeism is a more meaningful, research-based measure that better reflects school quality and student success. Chronic absenteeism is missing 10% of school days or, in a 180-day year, 18 days.
- *Based on parents, families, and stakeholder feedback, new metrics are recommended for inclusion in school reporting but not for accountability and school determinations*:
  - Equitable Access to Effective Teachers
  - Educator/School Administrator Retention

- Specialist-to-Student Ratio—including library/media specialists, counselors, school psychologists, etc.

### **Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)**

ESSA requires two school-support designations: Comprehensive Support and Improvement and Targeted Support and Improvement. Identification of public schools for CSI will be calculated by rank ordering the lowest 5% of Title I public schools and non-Title I schools at an equal level as measured by the overall score on the DSSF (CSI-1) or any school with less than 67% graduation rate (CSI-2).

The DDOE will identify CSI schools by November 2018 based on the 2017-2018 school year data. LEAs will assist their schools in conducting a comprehensive needs assessment, analyzing the data, and developing school improvement plans. The DDOE will provide support and assistance to LEAs to help meet the needs and to monitor the progress of the CSI schools.

The identification of schools for CSI status will happen every three years. LEAs will have up to one year for improvement planning and up to three years to exit CSI status—not exceeding four years in total.

After schools are identified, the DDOE will work with LEAs to determine CSI exit targets based on the data from 2017-2018 school year. The DDOE in collaboration with the LEAs will establish ambitious but achievable targets that will improve outcomes for students as indicated by the DSSF. The intent is to set targets that improve student outcomes, meet the needs of the individual school communities, and are reasonable so the school progresses above the CSI level in the next identification cycle.

Any charter school identified for CSI will be placed on the formal charter review process as outlined in 14 Del. Code §515 and will follow the charter formal review process in lieu of the CSI process.

The majority of individuals across all stakeholder groups agreed that the exit criteria for a school identified for CSI status should be the focus on the criteria for which the school was identified. Similarly, the stakeholder groups agreed that schools should have up to four years to exit CSI status. Most stakeholders—survey, Community Meetings, Governor’s Advisory Committee—conveyed schools should meet targets for a second year in order to validate and sustain outcomes for students before exiting CSI status.

Schools that have been identified for improvement under previous iterations of ESSA will automatically be elevated to CSI-Re-identified (CSI-R) and will receive stronger interventions.

### **Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI)**

ESSA calls for schools to be identified as in need of “targeted support and improvement” if they have at least one subgroup of students underperforming. ESSA calls for two types of TSI schools:

- *Low-Performing Subgroup at Level of Lowest 5% of Schools (TSI-1)*: Schools (Title I or non-Title I) with at least one low-performing subgroup of students, defined as a subgroup of students that is performing as poorly as all students in any of the lowest-performing 5% of Title I schools (CSI schools).
- *Consistently Underperforming Subgroups (TSI-2)*: Schools (Title I or non-Title I) that have at least one “consistently underperforming” subgroup as identified through a DDOE-established methodology (to be determined) based on the state’s accountability system.

The DDOE will first identify schools for CSI. TSI-1 schools will be identified based on an index across all indicators of the DSSF for each student subgroup. This subgroup summative index score will then be compared to the performance of all students in CSI schools. The DDOE will then rank the performance



of each subgroup in this set of schools. The 5% of accountability schools with the lowest-performing subgroups will be identified as TSI-1 schools. The DDOE will identify TSI-1 schools every three years.

Once identified, the DDOE will determine TSI-1 exit targets using baseline data from 2017-2018 school year. The DDOE in collaboration with the LEAs will establish ambitious but achievable targets that will improve outcomes for students as indicated by the DSSF. The intent will be to set targets that are relevant and appropriate to the needs of the individual school communities and that are reasonable to the extent that the school will not be identified as CSI status in the next identification cycle.

TSI-2 schools will be identified using similar methodology as used for the identification of TSI-1 schools; however, TSI-2 schools will be identified based on all accountability schools not already identified under CSI or TSI-1. TSI-2 will be identified annually beginning in 2019-2020. The DDOE will consider TSI-2 schools as “watch list” schools and will provide technical assistance to support LEAs, similar to the supports provided to TSI-1 schools. The LEA will help schools develop and monitor a plan for targeted support and improvement. If TSI-2 schools do not make sufficient progress prior to the next identification cycle for CSI and TSI-1, they may be identified for TSI-1.

TSI-1 schools that do not meet exit targets within three years will be identified for CSI.

### **Minimum Number of Students for Accountability**

Accountability systems often use a minimum n-size for determining whether to include a measure in a school’s accountability rating. The rationale is that, when the number of students for which a measure is calculated is too small, the measure is likely to be a less reliable measure of school performance. If the number of students for which a measure is calculated meets or exceeds the minimum n-size, the measure is included in the rating. If the minimum n-size is not met, the measure is excluded. The majority of feedback received from multiple stakeholder groups, including the National Down Syndrome Congress and The Advocacy Institute, indicated a strong desire to decrease the current n-size of 30 in order to address the academic needs of all student subgroups. The DDOE will use an n-size of 15 for accountability and reporting purposes. This will result in more attention and support for those schools that need it most.

### **Annual Reporting**

In order to provide clear and transparent information to parents, families, and communities regarding schools, there will be annual reports to provide a greater level of detail beyond the information on the DSSF. These reports will include:

- Demographic data by school and LEA
- Grade-level achievement data by school and by subgroups including foster care, homeless, and military-connected students
- Financial information by school;
- Narrative information on each school; and
- Other opportunities of school success, for example:
  - The number of specialists for the school;
  - The minutes of physical education offered to students;
  - The number of school librarians.

Much of the data currently on School Profiles will be the core of these reports. The content and formatting of these reports will be developed in 2017. DDOE will also be providing educator effectiveness on dashboards linked to the report cards.

### LEA Plans

Parents, families, and community members in each LEA have multiple opportunities to be involved in ESSA planning in their own LEA. Each LEA must submit a plan to the DDOE outlining their priorities and proposed uses of federal funds. LEAs are required to consult with stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, community members, and others in the development of their plan. The DDOE will utilize a streamlined, consolidated, and continuous improvement planning process to support the development, review, and approval of LEA plans that meet statutory and regulatory requirements.

The development process will be driven by LEA analysis of a broad range of data including, but not limited to, performance as measured by the statewide accountability system as captured by the report card, Educator Equity Dashboard, financial risk assessments, program analysis, and community input. An LEA will then identify areas of need as well as prioritize action items and targeted funding.

### DDOE Continuous Improvement Model (ESSA)



## Continuous Improvement Process

As part of the continuous improvement cycle, the DDOE:

- Will provide technical assistance and guidance to LEAs to assist in completing a comprehensive needs assessment—will be required as part of the consolidated grant application process.
- Will guide LEAs in their plan writing by identifying and prioritizing their greatest needs as well as planning long- and short-term implementation strategies.
- May monitor implementation of targeted strategies through the year and provide evidence-based best practices, supporting resources, on-demand guidance, and technical assistance documents to support effective execution and implementation.

The DDOE will implement a system of supports to provide LEAs with differentiated technical assistance to support effective implementation of LEA strategies. The DDOE plans to offer availability of all supports to any requesting LEA or school; however, the degree of the DDOE-guided support will be based on data that may include performance as measured by the statewide accountability system and captured by annual reports, Educator Equity Dashboard, financial risk assessments, program analysis, and educator and community input.

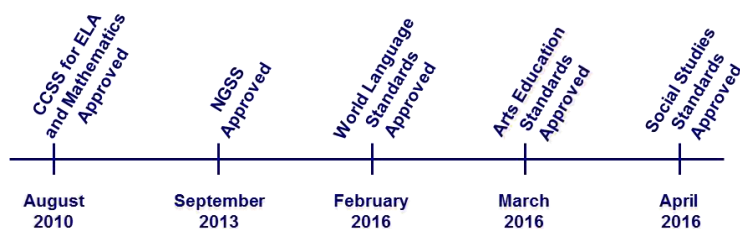
## Monitoring

The DDOE plans to monitor all LEAs at a minimum of once every five years. Additional monitoring frequency may be based on the annual results of program analysis, financial risk assessment, single-state audit determinations, performance as measured by the statewide accountability system, and captured by the report card, educator data, and/or additional data provided by the LEA.



## Rigorous Standards, Instruction, and Assessment

Establishing rigorous, internationally benchmarked college- and career-ready standards has been a central component of Delaware’s education system. These standards set the foundation for high expectations for what Delaware students must know and be able to do, and the DDOE believes that its students will rise to meet these expectations. Delaware is fully committed to not just adopting high standards but also to implementing enhanced standards in collaboration with our LEAs by providing responsive technical assistance and professional learning.



By conducting a thorough examination of Delaware’s previous standards, the DDOE rewrote several benchmarks in early elementary ELA and middle school mathematics and performed an alignment study in the spring 2010. Subsequently, the DDOE proposed new college- and career-ready standards, and the Delaware State Board of Education (SBE) approved the standards (14 DE Admin Code 501) in August 2010.

In 2011, Delaware joined 26 additional states to develop K-12 science standards known as the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Delaware helped to develop these standards with the assistance of several leading voices in science and science education in Delaware, such as scientists, administrators, teachers, and business leaders. NGSS provides a complete science foundation to prepare Delaware students to be college and career ready. DDOE proposed NGSS as the new science standards for Delaware, and the SBE adopted them in the fall 2013.

In 2015, the DDOE began an initiative to update Delaware's arts standards to align to college and career expectations. Over 300 arts educators signed a petition asking Delaware to adopt a new set of standards that would help elevate academic achievement and prepare students for college, career, and citizenship readiness. Using a national framework, the SBE adopted the new, teacher-developed standards in the spring 2016. In addition, revisions to social studies and world language standards were proposed by DDOE to better align with college and career expectations, and were approved by the SBE in 2016.

### **Dissemination of Resources and Professional Learning for College and Career Standards**

Since the development of the college- and career-ready standards, Delaware has provided professional development for its teachers and school leaders ranging from data coaches to specially trained teachers.

- DDOE used cadre groups composed of ELA and mathematics practitioners and trained statewide data coaches on these standards through Delaware's professional learning community initiative. In addition to this systems-building approach for sustained professional learning, a standards steering committee consisting of the DDOE, LEAs, institutes of higher education (IHEs) representatives, and business and parent representatives agreed that a significant effort focused on learning the new standards was necessary. The steering committee called for school-based, guiding teams to take a significant role in implementing the new standards.
- The Common Ground for the Common Core professional learning program was launched in the spring 2013. It was targeted to LEA needs and supported with school-specific implementation plans that were led by principals and guiding teams of teacher leaders and partner organizations. Common Ground was available to LEAs for three school years. The DDOE now provides competitive grants on Common Core implementation, which is based on the work of Common Ground and allows school-based leaders to continue the implementation work of these standards in their LEAs.
- Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, the DDOE, with the support of the LEAs, began participating in standards-based site visits to focus on how the standards are being implemented for all students, and DDOE started to measure the quality of instructional supports and professional learning systems. In conducting these yearly site visits, the DDOE continues to provide ongoing support for full implementation of the standards while also gathering information to be shared with schools and LEAs, so that the state and LEAs work together to better support implementation of the ELA and mathematics standards.
- The DDOE, in collaboration with the Delaware Science Coalition (a partnership of LEAs), has invested in professional learning for hundreds of teacher leaders over the past three years. Teachers have been trained in science and engineering practices, creating NGSS student performances and designing three-dimensional NGSS assessments. Parallel to this work, a smaller group of dedicated teachers and specialists are making modifications and developing NGSS-aligned units for dissemination across the state.
- The Social Studies Coalition of Delaware has worked with the DDOE to provide significant professional learning and instructional resources to Delaware teachers for over a decade. In

addition, the Delaware World Language Teacher Leader network meets regularly to conduct deep, engaging, professional learning for educators.

- Finally, significant collaboration has occurred for all Delaware arts educators in public schools as well as in community and cultural institutions that have aligned classroom instruction to Delaware’s new arts standards.

## Assessments

Pursuant to Senate Joint Resolution 2, Delaware recently completed an Assessment Inventory process at both the local and state levels to allow the state to address instances where students spend too much time taking standardized tests, as well as instances where such tests are redundant or fail to provide useful information. Assessments administered at the state level combine with locally selected assessments to form a streamlined assessment system with the goal of supporting student growth toward college and career readiness. The DDOE will continue to provide this support in the coming years.

Developing fair, valid, and reliable assessments to measure attainment of rigorous college- and career-ready Delaware standards has been the central focus of the state’s assessment system. Following industry best practices, the Delaware System of Student Assessments (DeSSA) is the statewide system of assessments used to measure student achievement of state standards—see box below. This system includes general assessments measuring student achievement based on grade-level academic standards, alternate assessments based on alternate achievement academic standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, an assessment for ELs, and a norm-referenced assessment administered or required as determined by the US Department of Education for use in Delaware public schools.

A summary of the DeSSA is below:

Assessment	Grades
Smarter ELA/Mathematics	3-8
DCAS Science	5, 8, and 10
PSAT	10
SAT	11
DCAS-Alt1 ELA/Mathematics	3-8, 10, and 11
DCAS-Alt1 Science	5, 8, and 10
NAEP	4 and 8
ACCESS	K-12

- *Smarter Assessment* – The Smarter assessments measure the progress of Delaware students in ELA/literacy and mathematics standards in grades 3-8. The first Delaware operational administration of the Smarter assessments occurred during spring 2015. These assessments require deeper thinking and application of real-world skills in ELA/literacy and mathematics.
- *SAT* – Delaware has been administering a nationally recognized, high school assessment, the SAT, since the 2011-2012 school year. In an effort to streamline assessments in 2015-2016, Delaware eliminated the Smarter assessment in high school and transitioned to the SAT as its accountability assessment. The SAT administration occurs in the junior year of high school for all students taking part in the general assessment.
- *DCAS Science* – The Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System Science (DCAS-Science) assessment is a statewide assessment that is administered annually to students at grades 5, 8, and high school. The test is designed to measure student achievement toward the Delaware content

standards in science. The assessment provides a total score and three sub-scores in physical science, biology, and earth science as well as the performance level.

The DDOE is currently in the process of developing a new assessment in science, working closely with the Delaware Science Coalition. DDOE envisions a comprehensive science assessment system in grades 3-10, consisting of three distinct types of assessments. Under this system, throughout the academic year, students will take teacher-developed, embedded classroom assessments to provide information on learning in real time. Primarily formative in nature, these embedded classroom assessments will be administered at the discretion of each teacher.

- *DCAS-Alt1 and DCAS-Alt1 Science* – DCAS-Alt1 assessments measure academic progress from the Delaware content standards grade-band extensions in reading and mathematics. DCAS-Alt1 Science measures academic progress of all eight standard areas from the Delaware science content standards grade-band extensions. The purpose of these Alternate assessments includes:
  - Maximizing access to the general education curriculum for students with significant intellectual disabilities;
  - Ensuring that all SWD are included in DDOE’s statewide assessment and accountability programs; and
  - Direct instruction in the classroom by providing important pedagogical expectations and data that guide classroom decisions.

The DCAS-Alt1 is only for those students with documented significant intellectual disabilities and adaptive behavior deficits who require extensive support across multiple settings—such as home, school, and community.

Delaware is currently finalizing the requirements for and beginning implementation of the Delaware Communication Portfolio Summary (DCPS). The DCPS is designed for students who, even with accommodations, cannot participate in a meaningful way in the DCAS-Alt1, because they do not have a consistent and reliable means of communication that is understood by others. This portfolio is designed to be embedded in the instructional process during the school year.

- *PSAT* – Delaware students participate in the PSAT at grade 10. The test is composed of three sections, which are math, critical reading, and writing skills. Each of the three sections is scored on a scale of 20 to 80 points, which add up to a maximum composite score of 240 points. This parallels the SAT, which is graded on a scale of 200 to 800.
- *National Assessment of Educational Progress* – A sample of Delaware students from grades 4 and 8 participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading and mathematics on a biannual basis. NAEP is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America’s students know and can do in various subject areas. Paper-and-pencil assessments are conducted periodically in mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, U.S. history, and technology and engineering literacy. Beginning in 2017, NAEP will begin administering technology-based assessments for mathematics, reading, and writing, with additional subjects added in 2018 and 2019.
- *Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for ELs* – Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS) for ELs 2.0 is a secure large-scale English language proficiency (ELP) assessment administered to kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who have been identified as ELs. It is given annually in Delaware to monitor students’ progress in acquiring academic English. The assessment helps students and families understand students’ current level of ELP along the language proficiency continuum. ACCESS for ELs 2.0 also serves as one of multiple measures used to help schools and LEAs determine whether students have the language proficiency they need to participate meaningfully in content area classrooms without additional language supports.

- *Social Studies* – As previously stated, Delaware currently assesses mathematics, ELA, and science. The state-required social studies assessment was paused for the 2016-2017 school year as an updated assessment is under development to align with the new social studies standards.



## Equitable Access to Excellent Educators

A priority of the DDOE is to provide each of Delaware’s students equal access to effective and well-prepared teachers and leaders. Realization of this requires implementation of a comprehensive, multifaceted strategy ranging from top-quality educator preparation to the retention of our best educators.

According to multiple studies conducted by organizations such as the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at the American Institutes for Research, students from low-income families and students of color frequently have access to fewer quality educators and educational resources. Delaware has long focused on closing educator equity gaps because, as a state, we believe the achievement gap closes for our highest-need students only when all students have equitable access to the most capable and well-prepared educators.

While some schools or LEAs in Delaware have closed educator equity gaps, statewide student achievement data reveals we have more work ahead. With increased federal and stakeholder attention on equity, the urgency to spread these pockets of success across the state has never been greater. Using this momentum and the requirements of the ESSA and Delaware’s *Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators for All Students* ([see link here](#)), the following priorities are a result of DDOE’s engagement with diverse stakeholders to steer the work aimed at closing the achievement gaps for the students of Delaware.

- *Educator Preparation* – To promote increased learning and effective teaching, Delaware must strive for all of the educators working in our schools to be well prepared to assume the critical job of supporting and challenging all of our students. Research shows that well-prepared educators are more likely to stay in the classroom achieving strong student outcomes at a faster rate than their less-prepared peers do. The DDOE believes that improved teacher preparation will result in stronger teachers. Strong educator preparation is a strategy in which Delaware has been investing for several years. As the State Education Agency (SEA), DDOE is committed to the preparation of teachers in well-designed professional development programs and to supporting those educators in their early years in the classroom.
- *Recruitment and Selection* – Research shows that teachers are the most important school-based factor that affects a student’s achievement, and the second most important factor is the principal. The initiatives relating to educator recruitment and selection are designed to improve equitable access to high-quality teachers and leaders. DDOE seeks to reduce equity gaps by increasing marketing efforts for new educators, promoting early hiring, and building pipelines in the profession to assist in attracting the best teachers to Delaware’s schools. DDOE also supports recruitment efforts of LEAs to hire more teachers of color in order to better reflect the students they are educating.

- *Induction, Mentoring, and Professional Learning* – Current research highlights the need to provide greater support for Delaware’s newest educators to ensure all of Delaware’s students receive a quality education and are college and/or career ready. By providing comprehensive support to novice educators, the DDOE and the LEAs can work toward increasing educator retention rates; improving teaching practices of both new and veteran staff members; and most importantly, having positive effects on student achievement. DDOE’s commitment to educator equity includes a program designed to create continuous and effective professional learning opportunities for educators at all stages of the profession.
- *Career Pathways and Compensation* – Retention rates among high-performing employees are increased when opportunities for advancement are available. Research shows that high-performing employees are more attracted to career advancement as compared to low-performing employees, and high-performing employees are more likely to leave a position due to a lack of potential advancement. Currently, opportunities for educators too often lead out of the classroom. This research was confirmed by our stakeholders, who mentioned the importance of opportunities for educator professional growth while keeping strong teachers in the classroom where they can positively impact students. DDOE provides opportunities through the Teacher-Leader program in selected LEAs, which is designed to develop teacher leadership opportunities and identify best practices to spread throughout the state.
- *Educator Evaluation* – DDOE’s commitment to meaningful educator evaluation is both well established and among the most discussed and debated educator effectiveness initiatives statewide. However, the state’s educator evaluation system has not always yielded differential observation data at-scale or consistent educator sentiment about the importance of accountability. Several LEAs, numerous education leaders, and DDOE officials have consistently noted that all parties must work together to bring greater integrity to educator evaluation—that it must provide the individualized feedback/coaching, the accurate ratings, and the overall integration of multiple measures of student growth and teacher effectiveness.
- *Licensure and Certification* – DDOE believes a rigorous and reliable state licensure system should provide reasonable assurance that all fully licensed educators have the basic knowledge and skills necessary to be successful. Beyond minimum requirements, such a system should also distinguish between educators who meet the minimum standards for licensure and those with outstanding subject knowledge and teaching ability. DDOE recognizes rigorous educator licensing and certification requirements are necessary for ultimate effectiveness. DDOE works collaboratively with the Professional Standards Board (PSB) to set these requirements and standards for educators and leaders.
- *School Leadership* – Effective school leadership and ensuring that high-quality principals remain in schools are two critical factors in addressing identified teacher equity gaps. Stakeholders consistently note and data confirm that instability and ineffectiveness in leadership lead to equity gaps, and without correcting these two areas, it will be difficult to overcome these gaps. Focusing on one area of school leader effectiveness will not affect the system overall, so the DDOE’s approach is multifaceted and includes strategies from preparation to professional learning to evaluation. Delaware’s school leadership strategies build on our existing strengths while deepening the focus on schools and LEAs where there is a greater need.





## High Quality Early Learning Opportunities

The DDOE and Delaware Early Childhood Council promote the development of a comprehensive and coordinated early childhood system, birth to eight years old, which provides the highest-quality services and learning environment for Delaware’s children and their families. [Delaware Early Childhood Council’s Strategic Plan](#) delineates four goals (details in textbox), with correlating objectives and strategies, to accomplish this mission. Delaware’s vision for a sustainable, comprehensive early childhood system is driven by a statewide commitment to continual improvement, and it includes the goals listed in the sidebar.

Through these initiatives, Delaware’s earliest learners will enter kindergarten better prepared for success.

While all goals are necessary for a comprehensive early childhood system, Goal 2 and Goal 3 outcomes affect the transition from pre-K to kindergarten. Feedback from community conversations and individual stakeholders reinforces that many factors contribute to a child’s healthy development early on in life—children’s holistic social, emotional, and physical well-being are critical to their success in school and in life. This necessitates a shift to a pre-K-12 system for connections to the early grades and transitions through a student’s schooling.

Feedback from community conversations verifies that investing in early learning opportunities at a young age with increased funding and committing to quality accreditation and oversight is needed to support our youngest learners for school. Continued investment in Delaware Stars for Early Success, the DDOE’s quality rating and improvement system, increases the number of top-tier Stars programs, and thus the number of at-risk children enrolled in these programs. Feedback emphasizes that a skilled and stable early childhood educators’ workforce is critical to attaining this goal. The DDOE must also support its early childhood educators through financial and educational incentives, which require alignment of early learning and K-12 professional development and educator preparation. LEAs are also able to use federal funds through ESSA to support these initiatives.

Feedback from community conversations also highlights a need for linkage between early learning and elementary programs that reflect consistency, continuity, and high quality from birth through third grade. This requires:

- Strategies to support families in making the transition from early learning programs to their children’s elementary school;
- Increased understanding of the developmental needs of children by all stakeholders across the early learning and K-12 systems;
- Coordination of services across multiple state agencies serving children and families; and

### Delaware Early Childhood Goals

**Goal 1: A Healthy Start for All Children –** Delaware children will become the healthiest in the nation—physically, emotionally, and behaviorally.

**Goal 2: High-Quality Early Childhood Programs and Professionals –** All Delaware children will have access to high-quality, early childhood programs and professionals.

**Goal 3: An Aligned and Effective Early Learning System, Birth Through Third Grade –** Delaware will create an early learning system that enables all children to arrive at school ready and eager to succeed and that prepares K-12 schools to further enrich children’s early learning, guided by the “Readiness Equation”: Successful Children = Ready Families + Ready Early Education + Ready Communities + Ready Schools.

**Goal 4: Sustained System Improvement –** Delaware will develop and sustain policies, programs, and partnerships that generate continual improvement in addressing all children’s developmental needs.

- Smooth transition of data between programs, including the integration of data systems and the systematic assessment of programs.



## Safe and Healthy Environments Conducive to Learning

Our vision is to graduate all students ready for college and/or careers. This requires a strong focus on rigorous standards and assessments, while also providing a comprehensive support system for students along the continuum of pre-K to career. Data shows that student proficiency levels start to decrease at key transition points in this continuum, such as kindergarten readiness and transition from elementary to middle school.

The DDOE and the LEAs need to provide supports to students through transitions and for the challenges that students may face throughout their lives. Educators also need training to meet each student where they are to provide individualized support. The DDOE is committed to supporting partnerships with schools, LEAs, communities, nonprofits, and other state agencies that can identify needs, provide resources to students, and coordinate services. LEAs through their planning process can identify federal resources that will target areas of supports for students.

Statewide performance on Smarter Mathematics Assessment shows our proficiency rates max out at 55% in grade 3 math with a steady decline, particularly in grades 6-8 and 11.

A similar trend occurs in ELA proficiency with students achieving 60% proficiency in grade 5, while middle school and high school hover around the 50% mark. (<http://www.doe.k12.de.us/Page/3014>)

### Social Emotional Supports

Research literature indicates that multi-tiered systems of positive behavioral support create safe and caring learning environments that promote the positive social-emotional and academic development of all children. Additional research on zero-tolerance discipline policies have concluded that such policies are ineffective at changing student maladaptive behavior and do not promote student/school connectedness essential for student learning and achievement to occur.

To support LEAs and schools to implement multi-tiered systems of behavior support, DDOE partners with the Delaware Positive Behavior Support (DE-PBS) Project to provide professional development, coaching, and technical assistance. Efforts focus on building the capacity of the LEA Coaches (DE-PBS Cadre), LEA leadership teams, and school-based teams and team leaders to create safe and caring learning environments that promote the social-emotional and academic development of all children.

By concentrating on relationships and the social-emotional well-being of individuals, a sense of community and caring is fostered within the classroom that helps to build positive teacher/student and student/student rapport, which contribute to an overall school climate in which trust, communication, and a sense of belonging supports student learning.

In addition to the traumatization that can occur within the school environment due to bullying, other adverse childhood experiences such as witnessing violence, being abused, parental divorce, or death can alter the physical development of a child's brain causing behavioral issues such as impulsivity, lack of self-regulation, and physically-inappropriate responses. Preventative measures in the form of a strong social-emotional curriculum can empower students to self-identify behavior triggers and avert misbehaving by using learned self-regulation skills. School psychologists, school counselors, and trained behavioral health professionals need to be utilized to their fullest professional capacity to help deliver these social-emotional supports, trainings, and services to individual students.

Stakeholder feedback has clearly identified the need for improved wraparound services, especially for low-income students, homeless students, students in foster care, SWD, and ELs. The DDOE will increase the level and intensity of interagency coordination and cooperation leading to improved delivery of services.

### **School Health and Nutrition Services**

School Health Services is an essential component of the overall school program that supports the individual health and well-being of each student through quality nursing services provided by professional school nurses. The DDOE recognizes the critical link between health and academic success.

The health needs of students with chronic health conditions or at risk for injury/disease are met through School Health Services and collaboration with community agencies. School nurses work closely with educators, through Individual Education Plans (IEPs), 504s, and Individualized Healthcare Plans, to identify ways to meet students' health needs with minimal interruption to the classroom learning time. School nurses also work closely with students, their families, staff, and community partners to help students fully participate in school and its varied activities. The goal of School Health Services is to assist students to enter the classroom ready to learn.

In addition to requiring nursing staff in each public school, Delaware operates wellness centers in its school district high schools. The plan is for all school district high schools to have a wellness center by 2018. Delaware provides 51 Family Crisis Therapists for the K-5 Early Intervention program to work with children and families that are at risk.

Health and education go hand in hand. We know that a hungry child struggles to pay attention in class. The DDOE Nutrition Program administers several programs that provide healthy food to children, and these programs help fight hunger and obesity by reimbursing organizations, such as schools, childcare centers, after-school programs, and nonprofit organizations, for providing healthy meals to children. The DDOE supports these programs and looks to expand these programs to meet the needs of students throughout the year.

### **School Counseling and Psychology Services**

Studies show that students who enter school healthy and safe are better prepared to learn, school connectedness increases the likelihood that they will stay in school, and access to challenging and engaging programs will prepare them for life. Focusing on a whole-child approach to learning will result in increased student success. For example, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning found that students who were engaged in school-based, social-emotional learning earned higher grades and scored 11% higher on academic achievement tests than their peers who did not engage in this type of learning.

School counselors are trained to focus on the whole child and are, therefore, an important part of the educational team. They address students' academic, career, and social-emotional needs through their implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program. They maximize student success by analyzing school data, developing goals, and then re-evaluating their programs. School counselors promote equity and access to educational programs and resources for all students through their leadership, advocacy, and collaboration with others. They support school climate and safety within the school by implementing prevention and intervention programming.

School psychologists can help schools and LEAs use limited dollars more effectively while simultaneously improving school and student outcomes. School psychologists are integrally involved in the school-community partnerships to improve student learning. School psychologists can help

implement wellness promotion programs, such as mental health first aid and social-emotional learning in classrooms. They can also provide professional development in-services to school staff and families addressing student mental and behavioral health. School psychologists enhance coordination of efforts to improve school safety, including crisis prevention, intervention, and rapid in-school response to school climate issues.

### **Well-Rounded Education**

The DDOE will support LEAs to provide equitable access to a well-rounded education and rigorous coursework in subjects in which female students, student of color, ELs, SWD, or low-income students are underrepresented. Such subjects could include ELA, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, world languages, civics and government, economics, art, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, or physical education.

[14 DE Admin. Code 503](#) outlines required courses and course opportunities for all students, and [14 DE Admin. Code 505](#) outlines graduation requirements for all high school students. Delaware has focused on a well-rounded education for all of our students as evidenced by our instructional program and graduation requirements. Instructional program requirements require the core academic areas of ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies, as well as visual and performing arts, physical education, career and technical education and foreign language. Graduation requirements include:

- ELA – 4 credits
- Mathematics – 4 credits
- Science – 3 credits
- Social studies – 3 credits
- Physical education – 1 credit
- Health education - 0.5 credit
- Career pathway – 3 credits
- World languages – 2 credits
- Elective courses – 3.5 credits

However, these regulations do not guarantee that all students will have equitable access to the broad range of courses offered within a school. The DDOE will develop technical assistance, resources, and training/professional learning modules to promote equitable access to a well-rounded curriculum for all students.

The DDOE will support access and participate in rigorous academic standards through a comprehensive approach that includes a focus on professional learning, monitoring and site visits, creating feedback loops, and state funding. The DDOE will provide supports for local innovation and deep professional learning for educators. Additionally, the DDOE will provide targeted professional learning to coaches and LEA leaders to support implementation of Delaware state standards.

The DDOE will continue to support the BRINC (initially formed by Brandywine, Indian River, New Castle County Vocational Technical, and Colonial school districts) coalition's work in personalized learning. This LEA-lead initiative, using technology to personalize the learning for students, continues to expand across LEAs and will lead to increased achievement for students. Resources through ESSA can be used to support and enhance well-rounded educational opportunities.

## English Learners Gaining Access to a Well-Rounded Curriculum

Delaware's EL population is growing, and we value the cultural richness this provides to our communities and schools. In addition to supporting ELP, the DDOE is committed to measuring content knowledge growth of our EL students in the accountability system to ensure they receive a well-rounded education. The DDOE's English Learner Strategic Plan will serve as the catalyst to propel statewide revisions and improvements to the EL program. Goals within the plan are:

1. Engage every EL in high-quality instruction, designed to meet individual needs, and assessments
2. Foster highly-effective educators of ELs
3. Mobilize the community and engage the public to support ELs
4. Continue to refine EL education through intentional analysis of data

This plan will be published during the 2016-2017 school year and implementation will begin in 2017-2018.

## Students with Disabilities Gaining Access to Well-Rounded Curriculum

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 states that students with disabilities (SWD) should have access to the same curriculum as their nondisabled peers. After identifying needs and gaining input from stakeholders throughout the state regarding the academic performance of SWD, a State Personnel Development Grant was obtained. Through the standards-based IEP initiative, LEAs have received professional learning and coaching in developing IEPs that provide meaningful access to the general education curriculum for SWD. When developing a standards-based IEP, the IEP team reviews data and presents levels of performance to identify specific skills, services, and supports that a student needs in order to access and make progress in the general curriculum.

Based on stakeholder input involving educators, community members, business partners, and the Governor's Advisory Council for Persons with Disabilities, the DDOE has established the Delaware Early Literacy Initiative to implement Delaware's IDEA State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). The SSIP is one requirement of the IDEA designed to improve educational outcomes for SWD.

The goals of the Delaware Early Literacy Initiative are:

1. Improve literacy achievement of all students, pre-K through third grade, including SWD and ELs.
2. To support LEAs in providing a robust multi-tiered system of academic supports.
3. Decrease the percent of SWD scoring below proficiency on the state assessment.

A national study released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation shows that students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave high school without a diploma than proficient readers are (Hernandez, 2012). Educators know that students need the foundational skills of reading in order to succeed in later schooling and be college and career ready. This initiative was designed specifically for Delaware schools to build resources for priorities that already exist, such as Response to Intervention (RTI) and literacy professional learning. In addition, this initiative will strengthen the ability of schools to deliver effective literacy interventions to all students, preschool through third grade, in order to close achievement gaps and increase literacy proficiency. Through ESSA, LEAs are encouraged to enhance educational opportunities for SWD.

## **Career and College Readiness and Success**

When students participate in early career and college experiences and schools connect college and career success measures, then students will engage in learning to master academic, technical, and career skills that will prepare them for high school graduation, postsecondary education, and competitive employment in high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand careers. The DDOE has created a structure to support students in grades 7-12 and into postsecondary education.

In alignment with the Delaware Pathways to Prosperity Strategic Plan, career and technical education offers career preparation and continuing education that spans the secondary and postsecondary education system. These efforts support a diverse group of students as they enroll in career programs that reflect the needs of the state and regional economies and lead to an industry-recognized, creditable certificate or license that holds value at the professional or postsecondary level. In addition, work-based learning activities enrich and advance school-based instruction for all students through career awareness, career exploration, and career immersion experiences. Career support services, job placement services, and postsecondary programming are provided for all youth, with specific attention to youth who are at risk of not completing high school.

## **Specific Services for Students in Foster Care**

Students in foster care face unique educational challenges. They often lack educational stability, have poor attendance, fewer peer and adult connections, increased behavioral problems, and an increased risk of academic failure, dropping out, and juvenile delinquency.

Each year there are approximately 550 foster care youth attending Delaware's LEAs. It is the state's desire to continue and improve upon the services and protections these students were receiving as a part of the McKinney-Vento Act. A group of stakeholders, including representatives from the LEAs, the DDOE, Division of Family Services, Office of the Child Advocate, and Parent Information Center of Delaware, has been convened to discuss a plan for moving forward. It is expected that increased coordination of support will result in better educational outcomes for students in foster care.

## **Interagency Collaboration**

The DDOE has an extensive history of working in collaboration with the Departments of Labor, Department of Services for Children, Youth and the Families (DSCYF), Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), and Correction. Current initiatives include Early Start to Supported Employment, Pathways to Employment (related to Employment First), Project SEARCH, Start on Success, Workforce Innovations and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Prison Education, Adult Education support workforce development initiatives, and mental health services for school-aged children. These collaboration activities allow Delaware to maximize resources and implement best practices to educating students and preparing them for the workforce. The DDOE will continue to improve these collaborative efforts as well as expanding opportunities to include community partners.

A particular focus of the DDOE ESSA plan is to support a continuum of services in LEAs and schools. These efforts will include partnering with other organizations, such as the DSCYF, DHSS, United Way, and other service agencies in the state. Strategies include:

- Defining a common language regarding parent and family engagement, making sure to identify how it is the same/different based upon varying developmental stages/grade spans.
- Promoting cultural competency and trauma-informed practice among teachers and administrators.

- Developing a webpage for the DDOE website that specifically targets the parent, family, and community audience, and provides them a central, user-friendly place to access the information they need, in plain language, and fully accessible.
- Updating LEA school planning, consolidated grant application, monitoring, and guidance with a focus on integrating state and federal programs and community programs.
- Developing evidence-based technical assistance and guidance through a trauma-informed and culturally competent lens.

Developing best practice guides for effective and meaningful communication for educators, administrators, and parents will serve a useful purpose. These guides will include culturally competent and trauma-informed language as well as effective tools. Feedback from stakeholders participating in the Student and School Supports Discussion Group highlighted the following areas where the DDOE can support effective parent, family, and community engagement:

- Support school-based programs to serve children and their families, such as certificate programs, wellness centers, food bank, laundromat, computer labs, and physical and mental health services coordinators.
- Provide the DDOE community outreach support and encourage LEAs and schools to employ community outreach coordinators.
- Support for LEAs and schools to conduct home visitations.
- Support opportunities for students to engage in community service.

### Next Steps

Delaware's ESSA State plan fits into the state's overall work to improve the educational opportunities for all students in our public school system. This work spans from the youngest learners in our early childhood education programs to supports for ensuring postsecondary and career success. Our goals are ambitious but achievable if we continue to work collaboratively with our educators, families, community, and business partners.

The input of our stakeholders was critical to the development of Delaware's ESSA plan, and we must continue to work together to ensure we provide our LEAs, schools, educators, students, and families with the information, supports, and resources they need to succeed. The development of this plan provided the opportunity for meaningful engagement and new relationships that we must continue to foster. We have the same goal—all students graduating with the skills to prepare them for life. Together, we will achieve this by creating a system that has:

- Standards and curricula that will prepare students for success in college, career, and life;
- Assessments to measure their progress over time;
- An accountability system that provides families and educators with information on how well schools and LEAs are educating their students; and
- Supports for students and schools to help achieve their ambitious goals along the way.