



STUDENT SUCCESS

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MOVING THE VISION FOR EDUCATION IN DELAWARE FORWARD
SEPTEMBER 2015

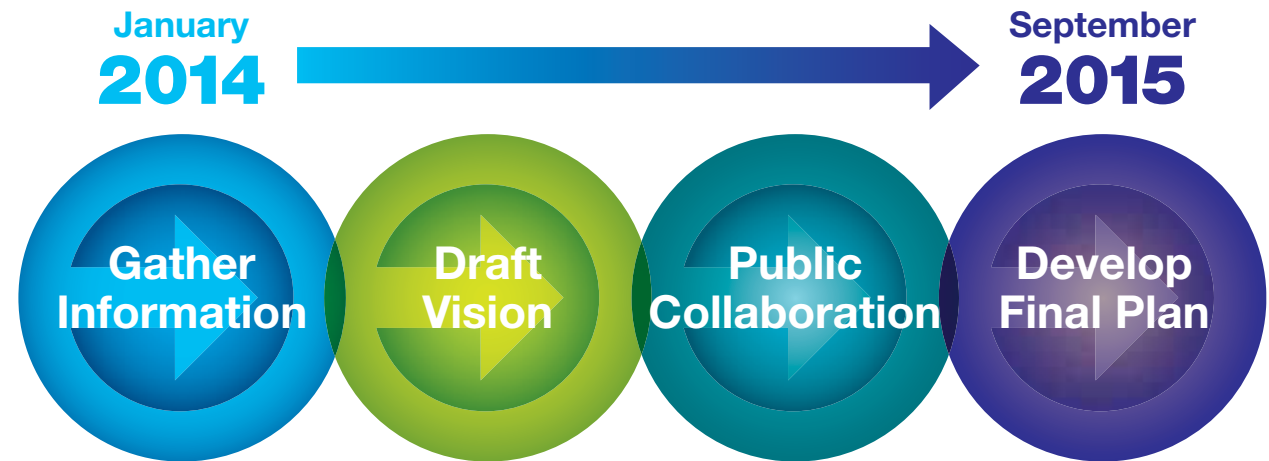
VISION
COALITION
OF DELAWARE

**From Sussex to Kent to
New Castle, Delaware
is all about community.**

Our ability to establish a shared vision for students and collectively wrestle with tough issues distinguishes us from other states. Since January 2014, the Vision Coalition of Delaware has worked to engage and unify Delawareans around education and listened to your views on the future of students and our state.

**The result is Student
Success 2025.**

Timeline and Process



The Coalition brought together a broad Steering Committee and six Working Groups that focused on key policy areas and engaged students, parents, teachers, and national and international education leaders, who lent their ideas and insights for improving student achievement.

Student Success 2025 would not be possible without the input of the 4,000 Delawareans who helped guide the creation of this ambitious plan. Delawareans contributed through:

- A public online survey for sharing opinions and ideas about education;
- More than 30 community conversations held in Sussex, Kent, and New Castle counties;
- A survey and conversations with more than 1,300 Delaware seventh through 12th graders;
- An online discussion forum; and
- Discussions at the 7th Annual Vision Coalition Conference on Education, attended by more than 400 people.

Please join the journey toward success for all students over the next 10 years. Visit www.visioncoalitionde.org for more ways to get involved.

The Vision Coalition thanks the Delaware students whose photos grace the pages of this report.

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Calling for Change

An education that prepares every Delaware child for success in 2025

Today's students will enter a world after high school that is increasingly interconnected and complex. The next generation of adults will face new challenges in the global economy, including significant advancements in technology and increased global competition. With a job market no longer confined to our nation's borders, Delaware students must compete for jobs against their peers from around the world.

To truly succeed in the future, students will need more than just core academic knowledge—the shared standard academics that every student must have as a foundation, including English language arts, math, social studies, science, the arts, and foreign languages. School can no longer be defined by the four walls of a classroom. To tackle tomorrow's problems and excel in the jobs of the future, students will need skills and attributes like creativity, flexibility, and curiosity.

Student Success 2025 imagines a landscape where equitable opportunities meet the needs of these students and where lifelong learners are equipped to adapt

to changing times. The goal is for all Delaware students to thrive, accomplish more, and take advantage of expanded opportunities aligned with their unique skills, interests, and abilities. This includes providing the support needed for all students to succeed, including students who are homeless, living in foster care, hungry, neglected, physically disabled, cognitively challenged, or learning English. **Every child in Delaware—regardless of zip code, economic means, or style and pace of learning—deserves to have options for his or her future and to be ready for whatever tomorrow holds.**

Advancements in Technology

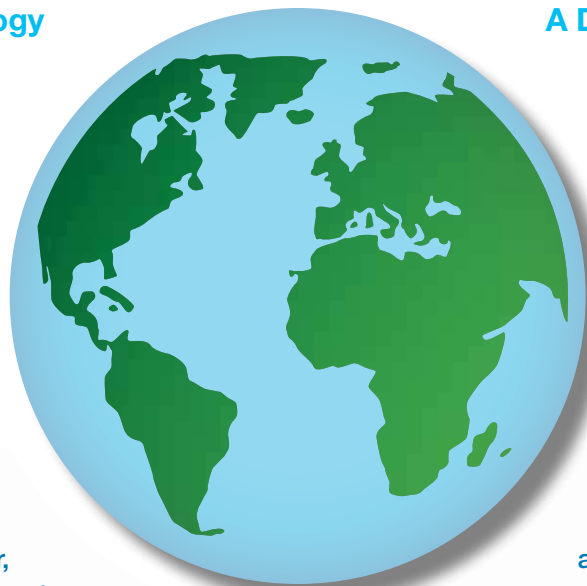
Access to the internet grew by nearly 500% from 2001 to 2014¹

Rapid Pace of Change

Most employed adults use technologies that didn't exist 25 years ago as part of their jobs²

Global Competition

Over the past decade, international peers have outpaced the U.S. in growth of adult citizens with a two-year, four-year, graduate, or professional degree³



A Digital World

As of 2012, 2.5 quintillion bytes of data (1, followed by 18 zeroes) are created every day⁴

Constrained Resources

Delaware's K-12 state spending has plateaued since 2008⁵

Changing Demographics

From 2005 to 2014, the proportion of students in Delaware who were racial/ethnic minorities grew from 44% to 52%, and the proportion of low-income students grew from 37% to 56%⁶

Building on a Foundation for Success

Ten years ago, educators, business and community leaders, and leading public officials led a charge to

provide a world-class education to every student in our state. Our alliance, known today as the Vision Coalition of Delaware, brought together the expertise necessary to undertake the pressing task of moving education forward.

Hailed as one of the most comprehensive and coherent education plans in the nation, Vision 2015 focused on nearly every aspect of our public education system to provide students with greater and fairer opportunities. We set out to disrupt the status quo, and we did. We set out to shift structures, and we have. **Nine years later, Delaware has moved on more than 75 percent of the policy recommendations set forth in the Vision 2015 plan.**

These include higher academic standards, stronger teacher and principal preparation, expanded early learning, and greater access to higher education and careers.

Delaware is and should be proud; our student achievement has grown at the third-fastest rate in the U.S. over the past two decades (1990-2009).⁷ But we haven't yet achieved all that we hoped. And as the world continues to evolve, so must our thinking.

The recommendations that follow build on the work of the last decade. Vision 2015 helped catalyze systemic changes statewide, but we need to take the work further. These recommendations draw on what we know from the world's top performing countries, and attempt to lay the groundwork for what it will take for our state to become an elite performer, both nationally and internationally.

Delaware Has...

- ✓ Raised **academic standards**
- ✓ Increased the quality of the **teacher evaluation** process
- ✓ Built **more time for collaboration and training** for teachers and principals
- ✓ Established **highly selective recruitment strategies** for new teachers and principals working in high-need schools
- ✓ **Increased requirements** for teacher candidates
- ✓ Built a system of **quality ratings and incentives to elevate early learning** services statewide
- ✓ Constructed new statewide initiatives to expand **college and career access**
- ✓ Established **one of the best data systems in the country** to inform improvements in the system over time

And Has Achieved...

- ✓ Increased access to quality early learning opportunities with **more than 10,000 children** with high needs served by highly rated Stars early learning programs⁸
- ✓ More students succeeding on a challenging state assessment, with **7 out of 10 students** scoring proficient or advanced on the DCAS in 2014, compared to 6 out of 10 students in 2011⁹
- ✓ A **30-year low** annual high school dropout rate¹⁰
- ✓ **84%** of high school students graduating in four years, more than ever before¹¹
- ✓ A greater percentage of high school students taking AND passing one or more **Advanced Placement exams, increasing from 7.6% of the class of 2000 to 17% of the class of 2013**^{12, 13}
- ✓ A greater percentage of Delawareans ages 18-24 attaining education greater than a high school diploma, **increasing from 41% in 2005 to 54% in 2013**^{14, 15}

Delaware Can and Must Do More

Despite the headway we've made, there remains a lot of work to do. **There is an urgent need to eliminate the persistent gaps in achievement and opportunities** between low- and high-income students, as well as the gaps between Delaware students and those in other countries. There are countless examples of excellence in schools across the state, but Delaware can and must do more to turn these pockets of excellence into excellence for each student.

“I think our schools are working for a majority of people, but some kids need the extra push. Challenge them more. They need higher expectations.”

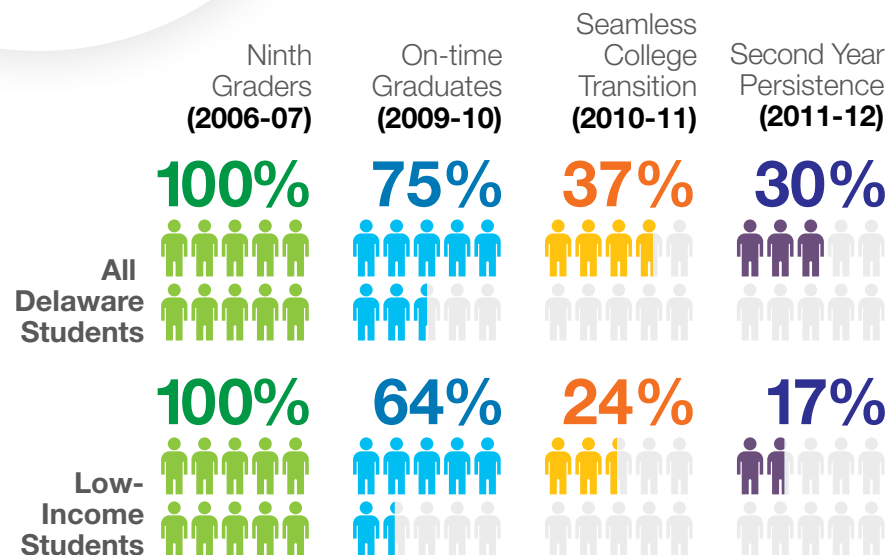
David, age 13



Student Success Must Be Accelerated

... to Propel More Students through High School and Beyond

Only thirty percent of Delaware students who entered ninth grade in 2006-07 graduated from high school, transitioned to college, and enrolled in a second year of college.¹⁶ The drop-off rate is even higher for low-income students. Only 17 percent of low-income students make it from ninth grade to a second year of college.



... and as Early as Third Grade

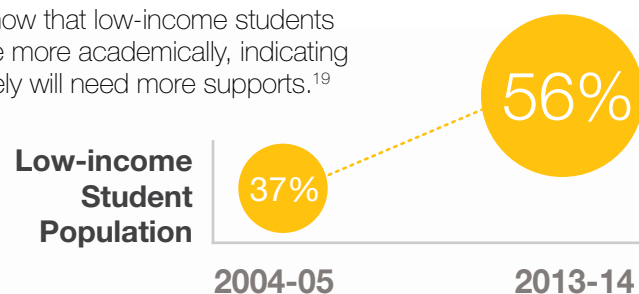
Research indicates that a child who can read on grade level by third grade is **four times more likely to graduate** by age 19 than a child who does not read proficiently by that time.¹⁷ However, state and national assessments of reading show that students begin **falling behind at an early age**. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicated **only 38 percent of fourth graders** were proficient in reading.¹⁸

Delaware's Goal

By 2025, **65%** of Delawareans ages 18-24 will attain education greater than a high school diploma, including some college, a two-year, four-year, or advanced degree. Today only 54% of students 18-24 attain education greater than a high school degree, including some college, a two-year, four-year, or advanced degree.

Did You Know? Delaware's Public School Student Population is Changing

Data show that low-income students struggle more academically, indicating they likely will need more supports.¹⁹



A North Star for Our Students

The North Star guides our journey on the path

to excellence. It shows what students need to know, be, and do to live a lifetime of success. It serves as the

“To me, curiosity is the most important because it leads you to new discoveries.”

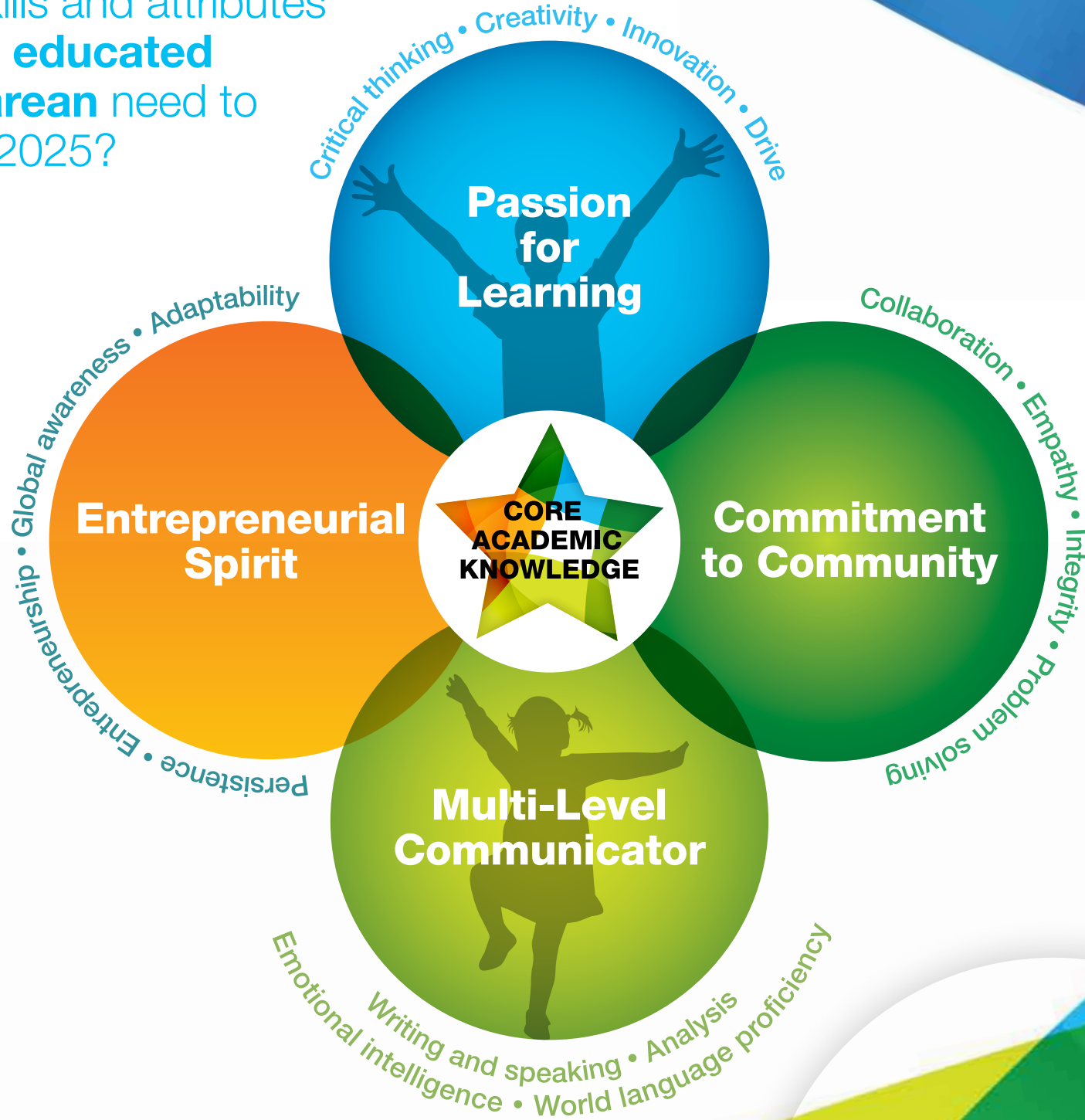
Genesis, age 10



beacon for our vision to improve public schools for every Delaware student. Students will still need core academic knowledge to provide a foundation for learning, yet they will also need skills and attributes that go beyond academics. With volumes of information available at our fingertips, the learning experience will no longer be passive—students will need to drive it. As technology plays a bigger role in the

lives of our children, the ability to communicate with peers at home and globally will become increasingly important. As the world of work becomes more complex, young people will need to be adaptable and be prepared to learn throughout their lives. And as the social and environmental challenges in our communities grow, our children will need to be more empathetic and innovative in their problem-solving. Collectively, the skills found in the North Star—a distillation of comments shared by 4,000 Delawareans as well as several national and international contributors—will prepare students to be strong communicators, engaged citizens, successful in their careers, and lifelong learners. With our focus on the North Star, Delaware can build a system of public education that builds toward these attributes, so that children can succeed no matter which path they choose.

What skills and attributes does an **educated Delawarean** need to have in 2025?



Reimagining Learning in 2025

Delaware students are calling for change. They want their middle and high school years to feel connected to real-life college and career experiences. Many have interests they'd like to explore after high school, but most are unsure of the steps to get there.

The North Star vision rethinks all aspects of our education system—from how we measure results to how we train our teachers, spend our public dollars, and even how we design and define schools. The vision for the next decade reimagines where and how teaching and learning occur and a new generation of students who control their educational destiny.

To ensure education is relevant to students' future aspirations and helps them to develop holistically, the North Star reimagines what learning could—and is beginning to—look like.

Personalized and expanded experiences will be essential to achieving the North Star. If we as Delawareans want our students to become more innovative, creative arts experiences will need to play a bigger role; if we want them to be more globally aware, foreign language proficiency will need to start earlier; if we believe certain content areas like science, technology, engineering, and math are key job growth sectors, we need to expand those opportunities. And if we want our students to have relevant skills when they leave high school, work experiences and career-oriented online learning will need to be incorporated into every child's education.

In a survey, **only about half of Delaware students said they see how the schoolwork they are doing now will help them after high school.**²⁰

Our young people are competing in a global economy—one that grows more competitive and interconnected all the time.

Delaware students are competing against global peers for job opportunities. Today, experts approximate that if compared to global peers, Delaware would rank internationally:²¹

21st in reading
31st in math
28th in science

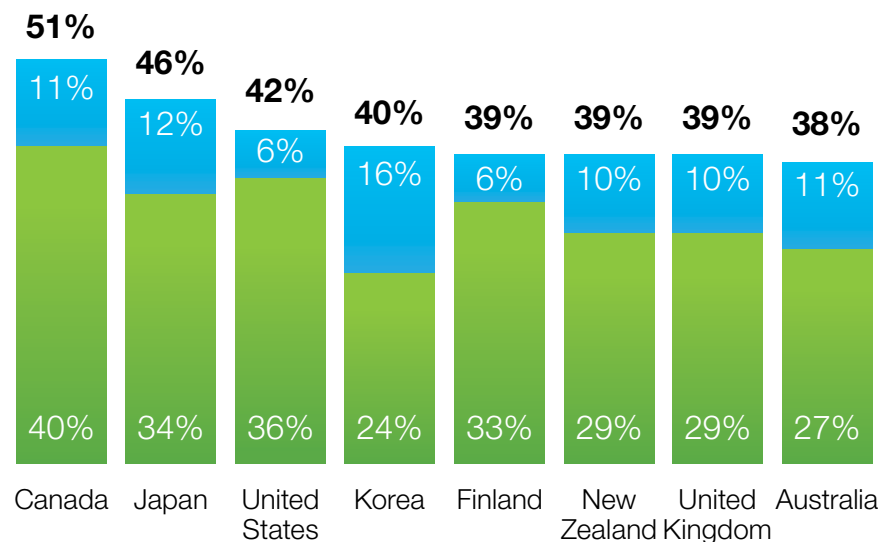


An increasing number of jobs will require a four-year degree. Today, only

40%

of working-age Delawareans hold a 2- or 4-year college degree²²

The U.S. remains among the top five countries for overall educational attainment for adult citizens (ages 25-64) who have two-year, four-year, graduate, or professional degrees. But in the past decade, many international peers have begun to outpace the U.S. in terms of increasing educational attainment of the adult population.²³



■ 2000 ■ 2000 - 2011 Increase

The Student Experience in 2025

What will student learning look like in 10 years? Students will follow different paths to lead them to success—based on their own learning styles and interests, and bolstered by exposure to careers. Teachers and educators will still hold the entire system together—and remain critical guides on the path to success.

Leveraging Technology

Enormous leaps in innovation transform the learning experience. Increased digital access provides more students with opportunities from all over the world, while open-source knowledge exchanges drive and accelerate learning.

High-quality early learning

lays the foundation for skills like determination, sociability, communication, and early literacy and math skills.

Students learn and earn **credit** at community organizations like art museums, dance studios, and more.

CULTURE

Student Needs Drive Learning

Students can work at their own pace, moving to the next lesson when they achieve mastery. Personalized learning shifts the classroom focus onto students' unique needs, while related learning opportunities outside school walls broaden their horizons.

Language immersion

programs equip students for a global community.

Real world work experiences while still in high school provide students with new insights and career exploration.



COMMUNITY

Wrap-around services provide students enrichment, a safe place to learn, and health services.

Flexible and Seamless Transitions

Students are supported to flexibly move from one level of subject mastery to another based on their abilities and interests. Connections made between early childhood learning and kindergarten—through high school, college, and careers—allow for more cohesive learning opportunities.



Career opportunities are now within reach if students are ready to join the workforce.



Students earn college credits before completing high school.



Mentors and tutors provide individual attention, advocacy, and life skills development.

Students may pursue advanced coursework, one-year certification, or a two- or four-year degree, as well as additional education throughout their careers.



Family Support and Engagement

In-person and tech-based approaches build stronger connections and communication between schools and families. Student-led parent-teacher conferences empower families with ownership of the educational experience.

Student Success 2025: What It Will Take

With the North Star lighting the way, these recommendations for student success revolve around six core areas. Three areas deal directly with the student experience: quality early learning for all children, a personalized educational experience, and postsecondary success that includes work and training beyond high school. The remaining three areas—educator support and development, funding, and governance—act as vital supports that enable students to reach success.

“I feel good going into college because the staff at my schools have always challenged me to reach higher.” *Jim, age 18*



Core Areas to Achieve **Student Success 2025**



A green silhouette of a child in a jumping pose, positioned behind the title text.

Early Learning

Birth to age eight represents a unique developmental period during which young children acquire foundational physical, social, cognitive, and executive function skills—the ability to persist, concentrate, retain information, think flexibly, and exhibit self-control. By the time a child celebrates his or her fifth birthday, nearly 90 percent of intellect, personality, and social skills are already developed.²⁴ When children arrive in kindergarten ready to learn, they are more likely to thrive in school and in future endeavors. To cultivate this potential, it is imperative that Delaware continue to accelerate gains made in high-quality early learning—and sustain and grow investment in this area.



Early Learning



Achievement gaps form as early as nine months.²⁵ By age four, children from middle- to high-income families are exposed to approximately 30 million more words than children from families on welfare.²⁶ Young children from lower income families also appear to struggle more with memory, thinking flexibly, and social-emotional skills.²⁷

Because some skills—such as literacy—must be established before others can be acquired, closing these gaps requires a system of high-quality early learning from birth through third grade. The need is urgent to dramatically reshape Delaware’s education system and embrace early learning as a full partner. Early childhood programs under our existing mix of public and private providers all meet basic licensing standards, but quality varies widely. Three state agencies in Delaware oversee early childhood. Aligning these in a cohesive system is vital to ensuring high-quality early learning for all.

Central to a high-quality birth to third grade system are talented, well-compensated teachers and leaders with knowledge of early childhood development. Fewer than half of Delaware’s early learning professionals possess a bachelor’s degree or higher.²⁸ The average salary for an early learning teacher with a B.A. is \$10,000 below the starting salary for a Delaware kindergarten teacher with the same level of education—despite a longer school day and year, and often no benefits.^{29, 30} And, Delaware requires no specific early childhood content for principal licensure.³¹

Research demonstrates that decades of investment in two early childhood programs—preschool for four-year-olds and comprehensive early childhood services for children from birth through age five—**reduced the odds of special education** placement at third grade independently and together by **39%**. Nationwide, special education costs nearly twice as much as regular classroom education.³²

67,700 early learners
42% come from low-income families
10% English learners
7% have disabilities or developmental delays³³



Delaware Stars

Quality Rating and Improvement

System drives child care program improvement and parent demand for high-quality early learning programs by setting voluntary quality ratings to guide families.

Today, 58% of Delaware children with high needs are enrolled in top-tier Stars programs.³⁴



Progress Underway:

- Statewide program to measure and improve program quality across all types of early learning programs (the Stars Quality Rating and Improvement System)
- Survey tool that gives parents and educators information about every child's physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development as they enter kindergarten
- Scholarships for early learning teachers to advance their education and salary supplements to support higher levels of professional development and retention
- Hundreds of Delawareans engaged in community-based Readiness Teams, which build strong links connecting children from birth to third grade and beyond
- Early developmental screenings now covered by insurance and leading to follow-up services

Recommendations

Expand Access and Quality of Supports for Families

1. **Increase access to evidence-based home-visiting services** for families of children most at-risk for school failure.
2. **Strengthen use of comprehensive health screenings and provide interventions** to address student and family needs and issues at a young age.
3. **Increase quality across all early learning programs**—including community, district, and home-visiting providers—**for children birth to five by raising standards for high-quality early education** and gradually requiring programs receiving public subsidies to achieve a required Star level of quality.
4. **Establish and incrementally expand voluntary, full-day, high-quality prekindergarten** for three- and four-year-olds. Community-based programs and districts could apply to provide education and care at a required level of quality, professional qualifications of staff, and length of the school day.

Deepen Investment in Teacher Quality

5. **Support early learning professionals to reach higher expectations.** Increase professional qualifications and associated compensation to align with K-12 educators, and provide incentives to reach higher levels. Over time, require associate and/or bachelor's degrees for early learning teachers.
6. **Strengthen professional development and career paths**, and articulate credits toward degrees. Establish individual licensure and assessment practices and **provide higher quality professional development opportunities** for early learning educators.

Strengthen Alignment with K-12 System

7. **Create a seamless academic experience for students from early learning through third grade by adopting and implementing a statewide framework** for aligning:
 - Early learning standards and assessments of what children birth to eight need to know and be able to do across all domains of development;
 - Professional standards, competencies, evaluation, and compensation for teachers; and
 - Leader (principal and early learning administrator) professional preparation and ongoing development to equip them with child development knowledge across the birth to eight timeframe that supports strong instructional practice.
8. Develop an aligned state governance structure to enable **unified and efficient decision-making** as well as **new and sustainable sources of funding**.

When children get a great start in life, we all benefit. Research indicates that \$1 invested in high-quality early education for low-income children yields \$4-9 in returns. This includes increased individual earnings, reduced special education, welfare and crime costs, and increased tax revenues.³⁵

A dark silhouette of a person in mid-jump, positioned on the left side of the page. The background features large, overlapping circles in shades of orange and yellow.

Personalized Learning

Success today demands that students demonstrate creativity, critical thinking, and the capacity to contribute in a fast-paced and ever-changing world. While all students are required to reach the same high academic standards, personalized or student-centered learning empowers educators to tailor instruction for each unique student—recognizing strengths, interests, needs, and pace, and structuring each student's experience accordingly. Advancements in technology play a key role in personalization by enabling students to drive their own learning progression and by equipping teachers with tools to provide support.



Personalized Learning

Today, our statutes and regulations assume that every child will be taught by a teacher in a 30-by-30-foot classroom. However, learning is becoming accessible anytime, anywhere. Through technology and partnerships with businesses and community-based organizations, students' learning time can extend beyond the school day, school year, and school building.

Student assessments today primarily focus on a few core academic subjects. As imagined through the North Star, improved assessments must include performance-based tasks and take place in real-world environments that enable teachers to customize students' learning where needed, in order to address areas for improvement. Innovative efforts to personalize learning are already taking place and generating increased student engagement and excitement about learning. And in some Delaware classrooms, teachers are using technology to blend classroom lessons with online learning. As these concepts become widespread, more students will have the tools they need to take ownership of their learning experience. As we look at education more holistically, we realize that the emotional and physical health of children are increasingly important to their long-term health and academic success. There need to be more seamless connections between schools and a range of critical wraparound supports in the community.

Ideally, dedicated resources and staff would support the investments in and growth of innovative ideas that work. Today, however, there is an uncoordinated and underfunded mix of public and private sector leaders trying to move this work forward.

Developing the Whole Child

Schools benefit from partnering with community organizations to provide students with the support they need.

- Evidence shows that students' **health** is linked to their academic achievement and exposure to the **arts** strengthens students' academic abilities.³⁶
- Students who are **physically active** tend to have better grades, school attendance, cognitive performance (e.g., memory), and classroom behavior.
- **Hunger** is associated with lower grades, higher rates of absenteeism, and an inability to focus.
- When students get the support they need for their **emotional health** and to develop **social and life skills**, they are at lower risk for poor academic and athletic performance, lower confidence, behavioral issues, bullying, and other at-risk behaviors.³⁷

At Conrad Schools of Science, A.I. DuPont High School, and McKean High School in the Red Clay Consolidated School District in Wilmington, students experience personalized learning through an online distance learning lab. The learning lab contains flat screen TVs, SmartBoards, seating with laptops, and cameras mounted in the room. This allows students to enjoy specialized courses with classmates across the district in areas of study that are often under-enrolled in individual schools and require instructional expertise, such as Legal Process or Italian Language.



“ I have way more trouble **learning** if the teacher lectures. I learn

Alan, age 10



91%

of teachers surveyed believe that in order to prepare students for the jobs of the future and to be productive citizens, **classrooms need to look different than they do today.**³⁸

Today,

Delaware's broadband infrastructure meets the basic technology needs required by the Smarter Balanced assessment. However, education technology experts **recommend broadband speeds 100 times greater** by 2017 in order to prepare students for college and 21st century careers.^{39, 40}

Progress Underway:

- High academic standards in math, English language arts, and science
- Student assessments aligned to those standards
- Early stage digital learning across schools, including distance learning and blended learning
- Statewide adoption of Schoology, a digital Learning Management System that helps teachers personalize instruction, share lesson plans, and participate in professional development. Delaware schools serving 75,000 students will use Schoology in 2015-16

way better if I actually interact with the lesson.”

Personalized Learning

Recommendations

Shift Policies and Programs to be Student-Centered

- 1. Set and uphold high expectations for all students across academic skills and social-intellectual behaviors** identified in the North Star, such as persistence and integrity. Revise annual assessments, student portfolios, and graduation requirements to align with these expectations, and provide all students with access to mastery-based learning opportunities to meet them.
- 2. Create a statewide network** of community organizations, employers, and education institutions that are approved to provide extended-learning opportunities (ELOs) to students for credit. ELO organizations would be approved through an application process tied to their ability to boost performance in specific skills and attributes.
- 3. Support the holistic development of children in high-need communities** that provide a broad array of wrap-around services to students and families (e.g., physical and mental health services) and engage with community partners to provide these services.

Support and Encourage Innovation

- 4. Provide flexibility and funding to encourage and support schools to provide more personalized learning experiences** through different uses of:
 - Time (e.g., learning outside the classroom and outside the school day);
 - Talent (e.g., redesigned teacher roles); and
 - Technology (e.g., blended learning).
- 5. Build capacity to evaluate and scale innovative best practices statewide.** Additionally, support schools and districts in implementing changes and increase public awareness of personalized learning.

Invest in Infrastructure to Support Blended Learning

- 6. Create technology-enabled tools** that monitor student progress from preschool to career against skills and attributes identified in the North Star, and provide students and parents with a menu of opportunities (e.g., in-school or online classes, ELOs) to achieve mastery. Provide support to parents and students on utilizing tools to increase student and parent ownership of learning.
- 7. Invest in increasing state broadband capacity and student access to internet devices** both in school and outside of the classroom. Support and guide schools and districts in key areas such as procurement, privacy, and sustainability.





Postsecondary Success

The North Star reflects the characteristics of a successful student one decade from now, one whose defining quality will be his or her readiness for advanced education and career.

While we know that an increasing number of jobs will require a four-year degree, we also know that there are many good jobs in Delaware that do not. In fact, we know that there are hundreds of great jobs in sectors like advanced manufacturing or health care that only require a one-year certification or a two-year associate degree, and employers have indicated that they can't find enough qualified applicants.^{41, 42}



Postsecondary Success

Decades of research confirm that higher levels of education correlate with higher earnings, higher tax revenues, and lower unemployment rates.^{43,44} Yet today's preparedness measures for students indicate that too few of them are ready for challenges beyond high school. This has to change.

We are proud that Delaware is one of three states that administers a universal SAT with 90 percent or greater participation rates.⁴⁵ We now need to focus on helping students improve their scores, as only 22 percent of the senior class of 2014 met the SAT college readiness benchmark.⁴⁶

Unfortunately, 53 percent of Delaware high school graduates, mainly students of color and from high-needs populations, are required to take remedial courses upon entering Delaware colleges.⁴⁷ These courses do not provide credits toward a degree, but students on scholarship programs must still pay for them. Remediation is expensive and impacts degree completion.⁴⁸ Nationally, fewer than half of students in remedial courses actually complete them—and many end up dropping out of college as a result.⁴⁹ On the other hand, students who excel in their high school classes currently have limited options for dual enrollment in college-level courses to move at their own pace.

For too many young adults, meaningful employment is not within reach. Currently, 12 percent of young adults ages 20-24 are unemployed.⁵⁰ This means a smaller percentage of youth are gaining work experience early in their careers, and, without any job experience, their chances of entering a fulfilling career are thin.

Student exposure to college and career must begin as early as middle school. High school years need to incorporate meaningful, up-close experiences at colleges, universities, and in the workforce. Life after graduation should generate excitement and ignite confidence. Graduating high school with college credits or an industry certification must be within reach for all students in the coming years—and Delawareans in business and higher education can help turn that possibility into a reality.



“Freshmen
year, I tried
welding.
It was
something
totally
different, but
I kinda
liked it.”

*Darrell, age 18
Recent high school graduate and
currently in welding trade school*



Through the Delaware Goes to College effort,

the Delaware Department of Education promotes college readiness by supporting students in planning for, completing, and submitting college applications and FAFSA forms. Delaware celebrates College Application Month, and all district and public charter high schools now offer college preparation activities throughout the month. In 2014, **98% of college-ready students applied to an institution of higher education, got accepted, and intended to enroll.**⁵¹



Progress Underway:

- Several comprehensive state strategies dedicated to supporting young people to attend college, such as College Application Month and Getting to Zero
- Five new career pathways in some Delaware high schools, ranging from computer science to culinary arts
- SPARC Delaware (Success Pathways and Roads to Careers), an online platform that links more than 100 businesses to students statewide that helps students explore career options
- College access supports and scholarships through SEED (Student Excellence Equals Degree), Inspire, and the University of Delaware's Commitment to Delawareans

Recommendations

Connect Education, Workforce, and Community Resources

1. **Support school redesign that deeply integrates K-12 schools with postsecondary education institutions and employers** and allow students to seamlessly transition across systems.
2. **Strengthen educator capacity by providing structures for highly effective teachers to co-develop curriculum with employers** to support new pathways. Expand teacher externship experiences to improve teaching practices.
3. **Provide all students with early exposure to workforce and higher education experiences**, beginning in middle school, with the goal of greatly increasing the number of students graduating high school with college credit, an associate degree, and/or an industry-recognized certification. Enable all students to graduate with one meaningful career experience and one higher education experience.
4. **Increase alignment among K-12, higher education, and the workforce** by connecting data systems to follow students as they transition across systems, and aligning K-12 graduation requirements with postsecondary entry requirements.
5. **Encourage industry associations to develop certification programs**, training centers, and apprenticeship programs for high school students. Engage employers in taking a significant role in developing industry-relevant curricula and meaningful workplace credentials.

Enhance Student Supports and Access

6. **Create multiple, rigorous learning paths** anchored in key industries, aligned to the North Star characteristics, and linked to a range of academic and career options. Provide all students and adults with ownership over selecting a pathway that best meets their needs and aspirations. The pathways must allow for multiple entry points and have the potential for advancement, with no dead ends.
7. **Increase in-person and technology-enhanced counseling supports** to engage students at an early age and help students and families navigate the system. Provide targeted support for those needing early intervention and those at risk of falling behind or dropping out.
8. **Develop digital, individual student portfolios** that document student mastery of both “soft” and “hard” skills required for graduation. Encourage higher education and employers to contribute to these portfolios by assessing student skills and by accepting portfolios when students apply for admission or a job.
9. **Build on existing scholarships to provide Delaware students with the financial means** to attend four-year, two-year, and certificate programs from institutions of higher education in Delaware.





Educator Support and Development

Teachers and school leaders are the two most important in-school factors contributing to student achievement.⁵²

Across Delaware, excellent educators may look different from classroom to classroom and from school to school. However, great educators share a single characteristic: a passion for teaching and leadership that propels students toward success. Preparing all students for the future begins with providing every educator with the preparation, development, and support to excel.





Educator Support and Development

We strive for all students to have access to highly effective teachers, for every school to be led by an exceptional team of leaders, and for all educators and students to be supported in their growth. We need to elevate perceptions of the teaching profession so that it continues to attract top talent. We need to scale up successful programs to reach all schools by encouraging innovation and creative methods, both in teacher preparation and in teaching practice in the classroom.

We believe greater individualization of professional learning for all educators, ongoing and embedded in the school day, will contribute to improved student learning. As educators receive feedback, their learning must be aligned with the needs of their students and school through a more holistic and meaningful system of evaluation.

Today, Delaware schools serving a high-needs student population have a higher percentage of new teachers and have lower retention rates.⁵³ These schools deserve special attention and resources, including culturally prepared and effective teachers.

Finally, the career paths for educators and principals are still largely driven by time served in the position and degrees earned. If we want to build the profession, we must rethink those paths to create new roles and responsibilities for educators based on demonstrated effectiveness.

4-Year Teacher Retention:

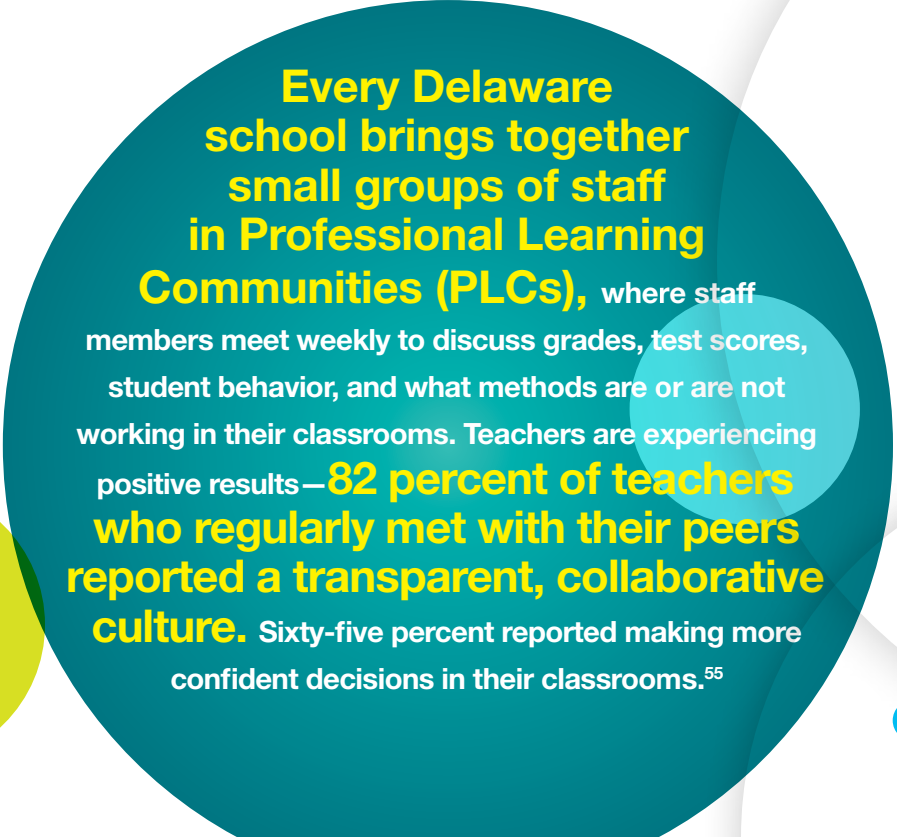
Percentage of teachers remaining at the same school after 4 years (2009-12)⁵⁴

High-needs
schools

42%

All other
schools

58%



Every Delaware school brings together small groups of staff in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), where staff members meet weekly to discuss grades, test scores, student behavior, and what methods are or are not working in their classrooms. Teachers are experiencing positive results—**82 percent of teachers who regularly met with their peers reported a transparent, collaborative culture.** Sixty-five percent reported making more confident decisions in their classrooms.⁵⁵

“My mom’s a para-educator, and seeing how she’s impacted lives makes



Progress Underway:

- Expanded opportunities for every teacher to collaborate with his or her peers through professional learning communities
- New policies that increase the entry requirements for becoming a teacher and improve the rigor of the training process
- State and nonprofit efforts to share best practices across statewide school networks
- Nationwide recruitment efforts to attract top teachers and principals to Delaware

Recommendations

Empower Leadership

1. **Develop a highly selective, rigorous statewide principal recruitment and selection process** available to all district and public charter schools.
2. **Provide intensive leadership training for high-potential school leaders, particularly for our highest need schools.**

Improve Initial Educator Training

3. **Ensure all new teachers are “learner-ready, day one”** so they are prepared to meet the needs of each of their students in achieving the skills identified in the North Star, like:
 - Being experts in the content and pedagogy of their discipline;
 - Working in innovative, flexible school models (e.g., blended learning, flipped classrooms, and other technology-enabled instruction);
 - Engaging families and developing cultural competencies; and
 - Supporting student social-emotional development.
4. **Build closer connections between teacher preparation programs and K-12 schools** by requiring that preparation programs demonstrate both how their graduates are effective teachers, and how the programs are improving their courses based on feedback from schools. For example, by:
 - Designing residency programs and model schools jointly managed by teacher preparation program staff and K-12 educators;
 - Sharing performance of traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs publicly to help aspiring educators select strong preparation programs and help schools recruit well-prepared candidates;
 - Encouraging teacher preparation programs to match the supply of new teachers with the needs of Delaware schools and offering incentives to teachers in high-need subject areas such as STEM, special education, English learning, and speech therapy; and
 - Ensuring that “professional” teacher certification is tied to demonstrated effective performance in a teacher’s first few years on the job.

me want to do the same. I think I want to be a teacher.”

Alexandro, age 17



Educator
Support and
Development

Strengthen Professional Learning

5. **Support the ongoing development of all teachers** by ensuring they get individualized support targeted at addressing their specific growth areas. Build teachers' capacity to support each other and to meet the needs of students—consistent with the North Star and the school's goals.
6. **Support an evaluation system that uses student performance as a key measure of effectiveness**, provides meaningful differentiation of performance, and utilizes feedback from multiple sources (e.g., peers, students, and families). Use these evaluation findings to more effectively personalize professional learning.
7. **Support new models of teacher collaboration and development within and across schools by:**
 - Using grants/waivers to encourage schools to provide flexibility around teacher scheduling and use of time;
 - Developing online Professional Learning Communities;
 - Utilizing a competency-based approach to professional development with credits granted to teachers based on mastery of a particular skill or practice;
 - Creating supports for sustained replication and scaling across the system of those approaches that work; and
 - Building a statewide, online repository of best practice materials where educators can access and contribute content. Materials could include high-quality videos of effective teaching practices or standards-aligned curricular materials and lesson plans.

Build a Strong Policy Framework for the Profession

8. **Design and implement exciting educator career pathways** that allow for a compelling and coherent set of options for teachers and principals to advance their career based on demonstrated effectiveness. These pathways need to allow for differentiated compensation and specialization, such as:
 - Providing accomplished teachers opportunities to advance professionally without leaving the classroom;
 - Providing teachers an opportunity to expand their reach with students virtually (beyond the “one teacher-one classroom” model); and
 - Allowing principals to have differentiated support (e.g., rigorous development of high-potential principals via mentoring from highly effective principals) and a differentiated compensation system based on their principal evaluation.
9. **Encourage districts to implement mutual consent policies** that require both teacher and principal approval for teacher or leader placements at a school.
10. **Ensure all students, particularly those in high-need schools, have access to highly effective educators by:**
 - Providing these schools with greater recruitment and selection support, higher compensation for teachers and leaders, and increased control for effective leadership teams in selecting staff members; and
 - Developing teams of highly effective educators who provide additional capacity to low-performing schools. Districts and charter schools could identify a small cohort of highly effective teachers who would receive additional training before supporting turnaround efforts at low-performing schools.

A dark silhouette of a person in a running pose, set against a background of overlapping teal and blue circles.

Fair and Efficient Funding

About a third of our annual state budget, \$1.18 billion in 2013, supports public education.^{56,57} This level of funding makes Delaware the 12th most generous state in the country when it comes to supporting public schools and the 11th highest in percent state contribution.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, the mechanism by which Delaware expends those dollars was established during the World War II era and has long been obsolete.⁵⁹ Consider how much has changed since then—and the student needs that couldn't have been anticipated.



A blue circle containing a white silhouette of a person running, with the text "Fair and Efficient Funding" in white.

Fair and Efficient Funding

Delaware is one of only a few states where education funding follows “units,” or staff positions, rather than reflecting the needs of individual students. Our funding system was built on the structure of schooling in the segregation-era 1940s under the assumption that all children learned the same way. The model is an impediment to innovation such as distance learning opportunities, and does not adequately reflect the far-ranging needs of our children—from those receiving special education services to English learners.

Moving toward greater funding flexibility at the school and district level requires maintaining sufficient funding levels. Our funding has plateaued, funds to districts have not been returned to 2008 levels, and many of the state funding sources are going down or are not expected to be stable in the future. Most states reassess property taxes every two to five years. Delaware has not reassessed property taxes in decades, contributing to inequities in state sources of funding for education.^{60, 61} Districts are expending great effort and facing growing challenges to pass local referenda to support the needs of schools. Establishing sustainable revenue sources is critical to reaching the changes outlined here.

As spending increases and revenue slows, we need to make the expenditure of those dollars easily understood by taxpayers so that they can encourage maximizing the use of every dollar.

A large graphic consisting of an orange circle and a green circle, with the green circle partially overlapping the orange one.

Understanding the Unit Count

Delaware’s 70-year-old system makes it one of the few states that allocates funds in the form of “units” which are state commitments to pay for specified expenses, such as a teacher or operating costs, with some exceptions.⁶²

Delaware is **1 of 4** states that does **not** provide additional resources for English learners⁶³ and **1 of approximately 15** states that does **not** provide additional resources for low-income students as a component of its funding formula.⁶⁴

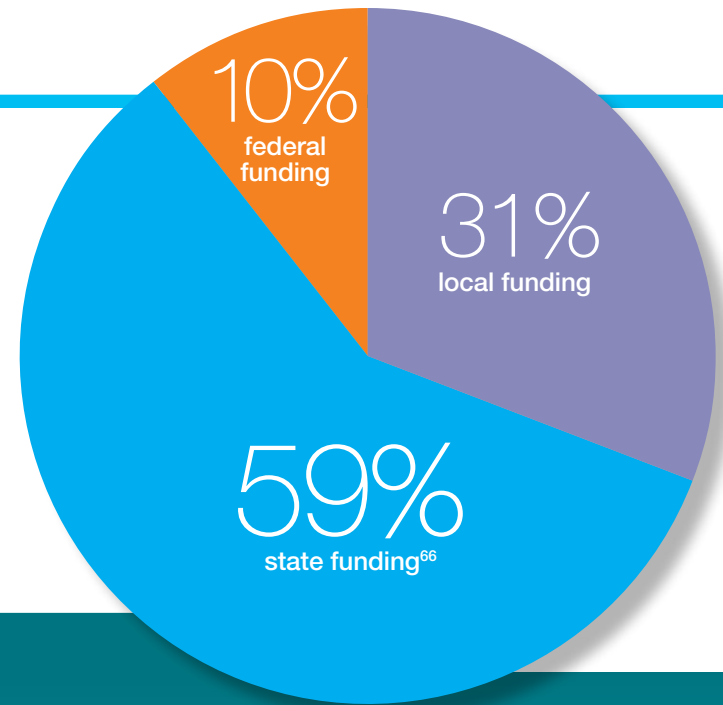
Property assessments in Delaware range from 28 to 41 years old, preventing equalization funding from operating as intended.⁶⁵

Kent County: 1987
New Castle County: 1983
Sussex County: 1974

How our public schools are funded

“If we don’t prioritize investments in our education, students feel like it’s less worthwhile.”

Halim, age 17



Progress Underway:

- Greater flexibility to enable educators and schools to meet the needs of special needs students by shifting needs-based funding from dozens of categories into three more flexible ones
- LEAD Committee studies (2008) that identified ways to reallocate \$158 million in Delaware’s education budget and put forward recommendations for how the state could move towards a funding system based on the unique needs of students



Recommendations

Ensure Funding Responds to Individual Student Needs

1. **Increase funding system equity by factoring student needs into funding allocations**, and update the system so that funding follows each student, enabling them to take courses from a variety of approved providers (e.g., other district and charter schools, distance learning, higher education organizations).

Increase Equity and Flexibility

2. **Conduct property reassessments on a consistent, rolling basis** to enable a more sustainable, sufficient revenue and accurate equalization process.
3. **Allocate a larger portion of district/school funding in flexible funds** so that district and school leaders can expand the ways they educate children to meet specific student needs, rather than in one-size-fits-all categories.

Build More Transparent Systems

4. **Create incentives at the local and state levels to increase efficiency**, particularly for sharing of services such as technology or professional development across districts and public charter schools. Publicly share district and school budgets as well as key district/school financial performance metrics in formats that are accessible to the public.



Our funding system was established in the 1940s, two to three decades before our schools were desegregated and before special needs students were federally required to receive appropriate educational services. Times have changed. So must our funding system.



System Governance, Alignment, and Performance

Advancements in instruction and learning beg for system-wide changes across school types and from birth to K-12 to higher education and career.

We want to build an innovative and stimulating system of public schools, where our educators work together across charter and district lines in ways that protect their autonomy, but create more opportunities to learn from one another. Delaware is a state of neighbors; we know one another. Our entire state enrollment of 133,000 is smaller than many medium-sized districts in other states, yet we don't always leverage our size to our advantage. Rather than creating a coherent, aligned, system of schools that are continuously learning and improving together, we are fragmented and too often uncoordinated.



System Governance, Alignment, and Performance

For years there have been discussions about too much bureaucracy at the state level, too many districts, or too many charter schools. In fact, while our state does not look too different from other states, the reality of 43 local decision-making bodies (19 district and 24 charter school boards) below our state Department of Education in a state this size presents challenges to creating a coherent, high-performing system of public schools.⁶⁷

Delawareans, like much of the country, have raised questions about how much to rely on student test scores in determining the efficacy of our children and the adults working with them. The recommendations that follow suggest building on the path to higher academic standards and aligned assessments that we've been on since 2010, but, consistent with our North Star, expand our definition of student success.

There is some work to build upon. Delaware's Early Learner Survey, which will be implemented statewide in fall 2015, provides baseline data for kindergarten readiness across holistic domains for the first time, enables elementary schools to tailor instruction and support services appropriately for their youngest students, and allows the early learning system to adjust to meet children's developmental needs. This is a start, but more can and must be done across the learning continuum to align our systems with a new vision of student success for all.

Finally, we know that schools can't do this alone. We know that a higher percentage of children coming to our schools are facing more learning challenges. The numbers of children that don't speak English, require special education support, or come to school from challenged home lives are on the rise. This will require all facets of the community—from parents and businesses to nonprofits and social services—to step up more.





“Student-led conferences allow me to show my parents how I’m doing in school and help us work together to figure out how to improve.”

Adamari, age 16

Progress Underway:

- Early Learner Survey, a more holistic tool to assess student progress
- Collaborations across districts, like the BRINC Consortium (which involves six districts working together on personalized, blended learning methods), and the teacher evaluation consortium of charter schools in Wilmington
- Wilmington Education Advisory Committee recommendations, which call for significant governance and funding changes in the City of Wilmington that would have statewide implications



Recommendations

Align Governance, Performance, and Student Success

1. **Establish a redefined system of support and accountability anchored around the North Star**, which includes academic measures as well as holistic measures, and encourages improvement and high performance for schools and school boards. Measure performance consistently across the system and connect performance with tailored supports that recognize differences among schools. This may be done by staff within the current Department of Education structure or through an independent third party evaluator.
2. **Develop aligned school, district, and state-level scorecards that track annual growth and performance** across excellence, equity, and efficiency measures. Use multiple mechanisms for measuring performance and share results publicly in an easy-to-understand format.

Strengthen System Alignment, Support, and Collaboration

3. **Develop a state strategy for supporting and managing the Delaware school system's portfolio of schools.** Assess the addition of new schools (e.g., public charters and magnets) against the overall value they add. Actively encourage expansion and sharing of school models and strategies that have potential to improve overall student performance.
4. **Build capacity of an intermediary organization to enable collaboration between early learning organizations, the K-12 system, higher education, and the workforce.** The intermediaries would develop policies and strategies that increase alignment and take an integrated approach to

improving system performance. For example, to create career pathways statewide, we need an intermediary that can connect our high schools to our higher education providers and employers in a high-quality way.

5. **Increase funding allocated to programs focused on statewide collaboration among schools and districts**, as well as with early learning providers and higher education organizations, to enable system-wide improvement.
6. **Encourage charter and district school boards statewide to find more ways to share services and create more efficiencies.** The state might accelerate this process by providing districts and charters with flexibility or grants to develop shared services arrangements and structures to support efficiency within and across sectors and by allowing districts and charters to repurpose any cost-savings realized through such cooperation back into the classroom.
7. **Align school and district enrollment options with student needs** to enable equitable access to high-quality schools for all students.

Deepen Family and Community Engagement

8. **Create incentives for the development of student and family engagement models** and encourage the use of two-way communication strategies between schools and families that utilize a variety of in-person and technology-based approaches.
9. **Encourage employers to allow employees to take time to participate in family engagement activities.**



Moving Forward

The 47 recommendations in the preceding pages are strategies to help all students succeed as we reimagine learning for the next decade. To turn these recommendations into reality, where do we go from here, and how can Delawareans support further progress?

Follow through on what we started. Delaware has made substantial progress in adopting **high academic standards** in everything from math and science to English language arts and social studies; dramatically increasing the quality of **early learning** experiences; supporting **more students to graduate and go to college**; and improving the **support to our teachers and principals** from their initial training to their professional learning in the classroom. Luckily, we don't have to start from scratch. **Sustaining the momentum and progress that is already underway** is important. In education, we often get distracted by the next shiny idea before fully implementing what we've started. Clear focus and quality implementation will be important principles moving forward.

Do more of what works. Quite simply, our state must identify what's working and do more of it. We've seen traction in areas like **personalized learning** that are encouraging students on all levels to grow to their full potential and leave school prepared for meaningful futures. **Career pathways and partnerships among high schools, higher education, and business**—in areas as diverse as biomedical science and engineering, to the culinary arts and hospitality management—continue to multiply in size and scope as business and education leaders realize their many benefits. We need to invest the time and resources needed to take these pilots to scale so that they can be sustained over time and benefit every child statewide.

Update for tomorrow. In order to do much of what we have proposed, there are some fundamental issues we must confront as a community. We hope our recommendations compel Delawareans to **update our infrastructure to meet the needs of today and tomorrow.** Our 70-year-old school funding system and our state broadband capacity need to change. We need to explore new revenue streams for our state and new governance models for our schools. Such updates—while substantial and complex—have the power to shape our future.

Collaborate from the bottom up. The goal is to create a **cohesive, integrated education system that extends from preschool through higher education.** To do this, we must work across agencies, in the private and public sector, and with the families, students, educators, and communities we serve. Implementing change in a sustainable and collaborative way will require Delaware to look to its **communities**, its **families**, and the **schools** themselves to act on the plan. We can expect different strategies and translations of these recommendations at the **local level**—and that’s a good thing. Moving these ideas into action will take political courage and vision at the state level, but they won’t take hold unless there is true ownership at the local level to customize these ideas for each community.

Focus on results, but broaden our definition of success. Good information on how our schools are doing remains as important as ever in guiding our decisions—**we need to set measurable goals, like the ones that follow, and be clear on when we succeed and when we fall short.** In our recommendations, we suggest building this independent evaluative function at the system level. When it comes to students, however, measuring ongoing success extends well beyond the limits of our traditional battery of tests. Core academic knowledge will still be foundational, and new assessments are better at capturing problem-solving and communication skills. But many of our North Star attributes—like integrity, persistence, and empathy—will be hard to measure, and that’s okay. Our vision of the North Star suggests **we need to rethink how we support our young people to grow and flourish into creative, collaborative, and caring citizens of tomorrow.** This broader definition of student success must serve as a guide as we think (and rethink) about modernizing and moving forward for our schools.

Measuring Success

Today

Student Engagement

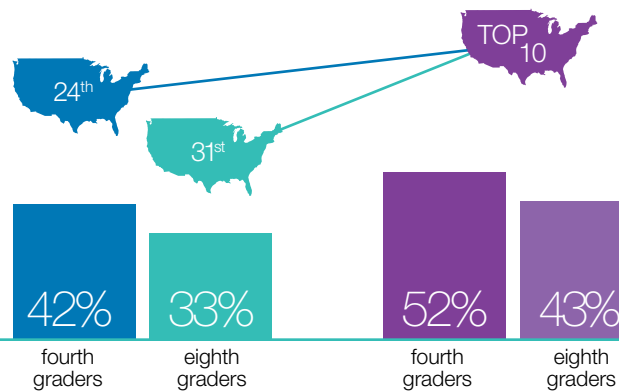
Students consistently engaged in school⁶⁸

78%

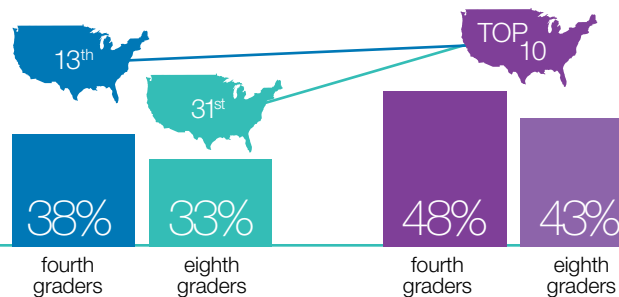
95%

Academic Success

Delaware fourth graders and eighth graders proficient or advanced in math on the NAEP⁶⁹

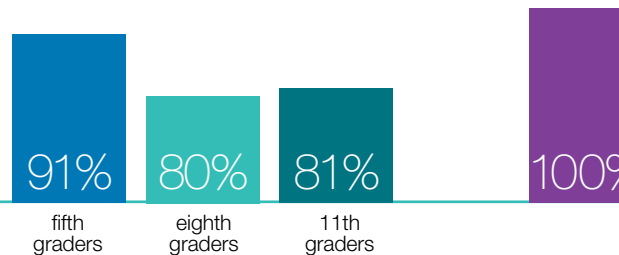


Delaware fourth graders and eighth graders proficient or advanced in reading on the NAEP⁷⁰



School Safety

Delaware students feel safe at school⁷¹



By 2025

95% of students will be **consistently engaged**.

Delaware's aspiration is to be top 10 in the country across all levels. 52% of fourth graders and 43% of eighth graders will be **proficient or advanced in math**.

Delaware's aspiration is to be top 10 in the country across all levels. 48% of fourth graders and 43% of eighth graders will be **proficient or advanced in reading**.

100% of students will feel **safe at school**.

Today

College Readiness

Delaware graduates meeting or exceeding the college readiness benchmark of at least 1550 on the SAT⁷²

22%

50%

Youth Unemployment

Young adults (ages 20-24) in Delaware unemployed⁷³

12%

6%

College Completion

Delawareans ages 18-24 with education greater than a high school diploma, including some college, a two-year, four-year, or advanced degree⁷⁴

54%

65%

Global Performance

Rank in reading, science, and math on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)⁷⁵

reading 21st

science 28th

math 31st

TOP 10

By 2025

Delaware will double the percentage of the graduating class **meeting or exceeding** the college readiness benchmark on the SAT to 50%.

Delaware will **cut the unemployment rate** for young adults (ages 20-24) in half to 6%.

65% will attain education **beyond high school**.

Delaware's aspiration is to be **top 10 globally** in reading, science, and math.

Get Involved

Your support is needed to help deliver on the promise of Student Success. We invite you to find the core area or issue of Student Success 2025 that resonates most strongly for you, and look for ways you can contribute.

Join the Vision Coalition in reimagining the future of learning, and to help make Student Success 2025 a reality:



- ✓ **Voice your support** by calling, writing, and engaging online. Contact your legislators, local government leaders, school board members, superintendents, and school leaders to let them know you support this effort.
- ✓ **Vote** for candidates that will support education. Ask elected officials what they are doing to support public schools. Encourage others to vote for local school board candidates, not just state elected officials.
- ✓ **Share** the plan with your family, neighbors, colleagues, and networks. We have heard from many of you already, but we know there are many more Delawareans who have a contribution to make.
- ✓ **Participate** in your child's school or in a school in your community, or engage with a community group, PTA, and programs that support our public schools. Get involved.
- ✓ **Support students** by volunteering to mentor a child. Read with your children or others. Provide internship opportunities at your workplace.
- ✓ **Stay updated and engaged** with www.visioncoalitionde.org for more information about Student Success 2025 and current activities and events, along with links where you can share your ideas and sign up for electronic updates.

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In Memoriam

This report is dedicated to the memory of John H. Taylor, Jr., a founding member of the Vision Coalition Leadership Team, and a fierce proponent of improving education and fairness for children throughout Delaware. 1944-2015



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