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New Citizens' Organization to Mobilize Public Support for Excellent Public Education in Delaware

WILMINGTON, DE – A coalition of business, civic, and philanthropic leaders has launched Education Voters of Delaware, a new independent advocacy organization that will mobilize citizens' demand for excellent public education in Delaware.

Doug Gramiak, who most recently served as executive assistant to former Lt. Governor John Carney, has been appointed Executive Director.

“A generation ago a high school diploma was enough to guarantee a decent job and a good living, but today our children face a completely different reality,” said founding chair Sylvia Banks, Manager of Government Affairs for DuPont. “We know that public demand for high-quality education exists. Yet progress has been too slow, and we will harness public support so that our political leaders can make the right decisions,” she added.

A bipartisan Governing Council, composed of business, community and philanthropic leaders from throughout Delaware, will guide Education Voters' policy and advocacy goals. The priorities include raising expectations, spending dollars smarter, and closing the achievement gap.

“We already have a world-class plan to improve public education in Delaware, along with recommendations about how we can spend our money smarter,” Governing Council member H. Raye Jones Avery, who is executive director of the Christina Cultural Arts Center said. “Now it's time to take public support for these changes to the desks of policy makers and elected officials.”

Education Voters will serve as an independent voice for change, representing—first and foremost—Delaware's families, parents and students. Education Voters will have the interests of students as its primary focus.

“We have become numb to the numbers in Delaware – only 2 out of 10 ninth graders will complete a 2- or 4-year college degree. And only 30-40% of our 8th grade students meet national standards in reading and math. The work of Education Voters is about our children’s future. Our children are the ones who benefit from—or are shortchanged by—the decisions made by adults,” said Governing Council member and parent advocate Dee Sewell.

Education Voters will:

- Inform citizens about education issues and what can be done.
- Organize citizen activists to demand change from policy makers and legislators.
- Give citizens a voice and a platform in Dover, so they are heard by their elected officials and other policy makers.

Education Voters is committed to providing a means for citizens who care about children to learn about key policy issues and to be able to exercise their voice. By engaging and educating voters on education issues and then mobilizing them to act, the group will build momentum for change.

“Citizen involvement and support are essential to getting elected officials to take action,” said Gramiak. “Elected officials listen to their constituents because that is the only group that can hold them accountable. Education Voters main purpose is to make sure those constituents are informed and are heard by their representatives.”

Education Voters of Delaware has been organized as a state-based affiliate of Education Voters Institute, a national nonprofit organization committed to excellent public education. The national organization will provide administrative, legal, and financial services to the Delaware affiliate to ensure that it can concentrate its efforts on policies that are important to Delaware.

The Delaware-based Governing Council, chaired by Sylvia Banks of DuPont, includes Charles “Chick” Allen, Allen Family Foods (Sussex); H. Raye Jones Avery, Christina Cultural Arts Center (NCC); Gene Bayard, Wilson, Halbrook & Bayard (Sussex); Ernest J. Dianastasis, CAI and First State Innovation (NCC); Paul A. Herdman, Rodel Foundation (NCC); Wayne Holden, Merrill Lynch, Retired (Kent); John Hollis, Nemours Health and Prevention Services (Sussex); Tyrone Jones, AstraZeneca (NCC); George Krupanski, Boys and Girls Clubs of Delaware (NCC); William Lingo, Lingo Real Estate (Sussex); Oradelle Sewell, parent advocate with DECC / ECAP (Kent); Marvin N. Schoenhals, WSFS Bank (NCC); Fred Sears, Delaware Community Foundation (NCC); Peter Schmitt, Voices Without Borders (NCC); Ben Shaw, Christiana Care Health System (NCC); William Willis, Willis Auto Group (Kent); Deborah Wilson, Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League (NCC); James A. Wolfe, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce (NCC). Beth Sullivan, President, Education Voters Institute (DC), serves ex officio.

Education Voters of Delaware is supported by tax-deductible grants and contributions. A broad range of organizations and businesses within Delaware has helped launch its work. These include the Rodel Foundation of Delaware and the Delaware Business Roundtable

Education Committee. (Contributors to the Delaware Business Roundtable Education Committee include AAA Mid-Atlantic, AstraZeneca, Bank of America, Barclays, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Delaware, Buccini/Pollin Group, CAI, Christiana Care Health Services, Citizens Bank, Colonial Parking, Inc., Delmarva Power, Dover Downs, Inc., DuPont, JPMorgan Chase, McConnell Development, Inc., PNC Foundation, Verizon Delaware, WSFS Foundation.)

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