

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS:

Assessing Delaware's Education System



July 2005

"We believe that through innovation, collaboration and a lot of hard work, Delaware can have one of the finest school systems in the nation by 2012."

— WILLIAM D. BUDINGER, Founding Director and President of the Board

ABOUT THE RODEL FOUNDATION

The Rodel Foundation of Delaware was established in 1999 as a supporting organization of the Delaware Community Foundation. It is the only statewide foundation focused exclusively on education.

It is governed by a board of directors that includes William D. Budinger, president; Donald V. Budinger, vice president; Paul H. Harrell, Jr., treasurer; Susan Budinger, secretary; Stephanie Fitzgerald, *ex officio*; D. Wayne Holden; Connie Bond Stuart; and Kristen Williams.

Members of the foundation's Advisory Council include The Honorable Pierre S. du Pont, co-chair; U.S. Senator Tom Carper, co-chair; Raye Jones Avery; Robert Buccini; William D. Budinger; Stephanie Fitzgerald; and Jack Markell.

The president and CEO is Paul A. Herdman, Ed.D.

VISION

All of Delaware's students will graduate fully prepared for college and the workplace.

MISSION

To help Delaware create one of the finest public school systems in the nation by 2012.

PRINCIPLES

- Great people make great schools; we must be competitive in hiring and retaining the best school teachers and leaders.
- High expectations and sound data must drive all decisions about teaching and learning.
- School funding must provide what all students need to excel, regardless of where they start.
- One size does not fit all; school leaders need flexibility in designing their schools, and parents need a range of school options from which to choose.
- Build it to last; we must involve families and communities in our educational system to provide a solid, sustainable foundation for school improvement.

ROLES

- We are a *broker* of national best practices, by bringing to Delaware national experts on such issues as school finance and early childhood education to inform state and local policy development.
- We are a *catalyst* in the state policy debate, by conducting a high-quality analysis of the state's education system and raising hard questions.
- We are an *implementer* of direct services — such as leadership institutes for parents and teachers and an elementary school math achievement program — where there is the potential to inform public policy.
- And we are both an *investor* and a *partner*, working to leverage the resources needed to accelerate achievement in Delaware's schools, with special emphasis on sustainable district-level initiatives.



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A Letter from the President

DELAWARE'S CHALLENGE ... AND OPPORTUNITY

On behalf of the board, advisers and staff of the Rodel Foundation of Delaware, I would like to share this assessment of education with you. Our vision for Delaware is to become a model of educational excellence by 2012. To build effectively toward this vision, we need to understand where we have come from and take a hard look at where we stand today.

WHERE WE HAVE BEEN: A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

Delaware has been a leader in educational reform over the past two decades. We have made great progress. More children have access to preschool. Test scores are going up. We have academic standards in place and assessments to measure student progress. And parents have a rich array of public and private school options.

Yet we still have substantial work to do. The rest of the nation — and much of the world — is working hard to prepare their children for an increasingly competitive world of college and work. Even as we celebrate our accomplishments, it is vital to examine where we stand today.

WHERE WE STAND TODAY: A MIXED PICTURE

The stakes are high. By 2010, labor projections show that Delaware will have 170,000 job openings but only 55,000 workers to fill them: a shortfall of 115,000 employees. Two-thirds of the jobs will require at least some postsecondary education. But currently, only one in three Delaware high school graduates is ready for a college education; the percentages are much lower for African American and Hispanic students. Unless we educate more students for tomorrow's jobs and attract new workers to the state, the future well-being of our communities and health of our economy are at risk. A top-notch education system is essential to Delaware's future.¹

To move to the top tier of states, we need to fundamentally re-examine our core education systems — how we recruit and retain our teachers and leaders, how we measure student performance and use that data to increase learning, and how we spend our public education dollars. In our view, tinkering at the edges of reform, starting a new program here or there, simply will not move us to where we need to be.

To focus debate and action, we have documented the factors that are important for elevating Delaware's student performance. This report assesses 10 aspects of Delaware's education system, including **student performance** and the **system conditions** that make performance possible. We used data sources that are easily accessible and nationally comparable so we can gauge our performance against that of other states over time. The report does not cover everything; rather it targets the most important levers in education reform.



There's a lot of information in the pages that follow, but certain findings stand out:

■ **Our state's record in elementary achievement is very encouraging — especially in reading.**

No state has improved its elementary reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as fast as Delaware has in the past decade. This record of progress shows us what we can do when we focus on a key priority.

■ **Our performance declines as our students move into the upper grades — an alarming trend.** Not only do test results falter in the middle and high school years; students also begin to drop out of school at rates that are far too high. Our graduation rate of 64.3 percent places us 39th in the nation. And only 36 out of 100 students who start 9th grade will enroll in college in five years. For African American, Hispanic and low-income students, the chances for success are much lower. At a time when the demands of the workforce are higher and higher each year, this is unacceptable.

■ **We need to do more to create a culture of success in our schools.** Our education system is well funded, and it offers a range of choices to families. But to reach our goals, we have work to do on teaching quality, leadership development, standards and assessments, and parent and community engagement.

WHERE WE GO FROM HERE: OUR UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

The analysis presented here is just the beginning. Over the coming months we will work with other organizations to host public forums to gather input and to generate solutions. We will work with a cross-section of education, business, grassroots and government leaders to create a collaborative Call to Action that presents clear solutions on how we can prepare our young people to excel in the worlds of work and college.

We believe that Delaware can be an example for the nation of how to break through the barriers that limit school improvement. Our educational spending is in the top seven states nationally, and our political and corporate infrastructure is accessible and engaged. Our state and our local districts are small enough to get things done quickly. But real progress will require parents and politicians, business and labor, and teachers and principals to pull together to identify and remove roadblocks. The payoff for this hard work will be worth it. If success can be achieved anywhere, we can do it in Delaware. We need to set the pace.

Sincerely,

Paul Herdman, Ed.D.

President and CEO, Rodel Foundation of Delaware

INDICATORS OF PROGRESS: A FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING DELAWARE'S SUCCESS

High-performing school systems share many common characteristics, and in this assessment of Delaware's progress, we have chosen to focus on 10 of these. The characteristics fall into two main categories:

- **STUDENT PERFORMANCE, which looks at academic achievement, the ultimate indicator of high-quality education:** There are four Student Performance indicators that track results by grade. We begin with high school to keep the end results in mind. The four include *High School*, *Middle School*, *Elementary School* and (because we do not track academic performance of our youngest children) state provisions for *Early Childhood and Kindergarten*. To illustrate progress and shortfalls, we use nationally comparable standards and measures as well as Delaware's own accountability system.
- **SYSTEM CONDITIONS, which looks at the policies and environment that shape the way our schools deliver services:** There are six System Conditions indicators that describe important levers for change. *Teacher Quality* systems determine whether we can attract and retain the best teachers in the nation. *Leadership Development* covers both the professionalism and availability of new educational leaders. *Standards and Accountability* refers to the standards we set and the data systems we use to measure progress. *School Choice* systems determine the authority school-level educators have to develop approaches responsive to community needs and whether parents can select the best educational options for their children. *School Finance* policies determine the resources available to each of our schools. And *Family and Community Engagement* discusses the key roles those outside the classroom and schoolhouse can play in student success. Again, our indicators use national measures wherever possible so we can benchmark our progress against other states and over time.

INDICATORS THAT ARE NOT REFLECTED

It is important to note that many other measures exist for evaluating our schools, and over time we may choose to add some to our list. For example, in the Student Performance section we focus only on student achievement in mathematics and reading. The inclusion of other essential subjects such as science, history, social studies, language and the arts could be justified easily. We focus on math and reading because these are the core subjects on which all other learning is based and because nationally comparable data are strongest in these areas.

In addition to national comparability, the indicators we have chosen are based on data that have been collected consistently over time and that are deemed reliable within the research community. But as important as these indicators are, they do not capture the magic that happens among a student, a great teacher and an inspired curriculum. Our inability to quantify or compare these factors does not lessen their importance.



Likewise, there are some factors that are either too hard to measure or that we believe will be addressed as byproducts of the system conditions we have chosen. For example, *school climate and student behavior* are included in many national polls as indicators of school quality. We did not include them here for two reasons: the results are difficult to interpret and hard to compare (for example, do high suspension rates mean that a school is out of control or is it a measure of a school gaining control?), and if we improve other system conditions, such as teacher quality and leadership development, and more fully engage our parents and the community, then many of these issues will be addressed. Similarly, *curriculum* is certainly critical, but it is difficult to measure its rigor compared with other states or how well it is being implemented in Delaware. So instead, we focus on the quality of the state's standards and, most important, our students' results.

HOW THE INDICATORS UNFOLD

Our discussion of each indicator starts with an explanation of why the indicator was selected and why it is important. We show Delaware's relative ranking nationally and also regionally with our neighboring states: Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Virginia. We divide the states into three tiers based on state-level performance, illustrated by the use of a common color scheme: green for the top 10 states, yellow for the middle 20 states (11 through 30) and red for the bottom 20 states (31 through 50). For each indicator, we evaluate our current status and trends over time. Arrows indicate whether we are making progress, falling farther behind or remaining steady. We also note gaps in performance among different groups of students. Our goal is to be in the top 10 states nationally in every category.

To the extent possible, we also take a closer look at performance within the state of Delaware — such as at student performance on the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP). Again, we look at current status, trends over time and performance gaps. We also have identified promising developments within the state. Each indicator concludes with the major opportunities and challenges ahead, along with a selection of Delaware voices from our interviews with stakeholders.

HOW TO READ THE INDICATORS



The color of the arrow describes current performance.

- = Delaware is among the top 10 states
- = Delaware is rated 11–30
- = Delaware is rated 31–50










The direction of the arrow describes whether the performance is improving, declining or staying the same. These designations represent overall ratings at a specific point in time and should not be viewed as static. A red ranking that trends upward is a positive sign, just as a green horizontal arrow may suggest that progress has stalled.



For example: Delaware's current performance is strong and is improving over time.



STUDENT PERFORMANCE





Category	Status 2005		Overall Rating
HIGH SCHOOL	GRADUATION	Only about two-thirds of Delaware's students and disproportionately fewer minority students graduate in four years, well below most of our neighboring states, placing us 39th nationally. Our average performance on the SAT is substantially lower than that of our peers. But we are improving access to high-quality courses, scores on the Delaware State Testing Program (DSTP) have risen steadily for all groups of students and nearly three out of four students take the SAT.	
	READING	Based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only 31 percent of our 8th graders are proficient in reading, which is close to the bottom tier of states (30th). Although DSTP scores have moved in the right direction, our minority, disabled and limited English students remain 20–40 points behind the state averages.	
MIDDLE SCHOOL	MATHEMATICS	Just 26 percent of our 8th graders are proficient in math (33rd nationally), according to NAEP. On the DSTP, achievement gaps remain very large and average middle school math scores are 28 points lower than elementary scores. But only nine states made more progress on NAEP in the past 13 years, and DSTP scores have been rising steadily for all groups.	
	READING	One-third (33 percent) of our students are proficient on the NAEP reading test (16th nationally), and we have made more gains than any state since 1992. We are improving faster in elementary school reading than in any other level or subject. Achievement gaps are closing, and if we can continue to accelerate progress, we soon can be among the best in the nation.	
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	MATHEMATICS	Thirty-one percent of our students are proficient on the NAEP math test, placing us 28th nationally and well behind our neighbors. Progress has been slower than in reading, but DSTP scores are up (especially in grade 5) and achievement gaps across student groups are closing.	
	READING	One-third (33 percent) of our students are proficient on the NAEP reading test (16th nationally), and we have made more gains than any state since 1992. We are improving faster in elementary school reading than in any other level or subject. Achievement gaps are closing, and if we can continue to accelerate progress, we soon can be among the best in the nation.	
EARLY CHILDHOOD AND KINDERGARTEN	READINESS	Our Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP) makes preschool available for all 4-year-olds in poverty, and about a quarter of our 4-year-olds are now enrolled in either Head Start or ECAP. We have no state program for 3-year-olds. Although access is rising, only 23 percent of our kindergarteners are in full-day programs, compared to more than 60 percent nationally. But several districts serving large numbers of low-income children sponsor voluntary full-day kindergarten programs, and the state has funded a \$1 million pilot program to increase access to this educational opportunity in the years ahead.	

SYSTEM CONDITIONS

The color of the arrow describes current performance.

- = Delaware is among the top 10 states
- = Delaware is rated 11–30
- = Delaware is rated 31–50

The direction of the arrow describes whether the performance is improving, declining or staying the same.

Category	Status 2005	Overall Rating
TEACHER QUALITY	Among in-school factors, teacher quality has the strongest connection to increased student performance, and we have substantial work ahead to find, keep and support the best teachers. We rank 27th on a national index of teacher quality. We have relatively high teacher salaries and the highest percentage of National Board–certified teachers in the region. However, we hire our teachers late; more than two-thirds are not hired until August, which limits our ability to compete with other states that hire in the spring. Also, nearly half of all new teachers leave in their first five years, suggesting the need to improve mentoring and school conditions. But the state and many school districts are working together to improve recruitment and retention.	
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT	We need great leaders to have great schools, and a predictable pipeline of talented leaders responsive to community needs is essential. With two-thirds of our superintendents and principals eligible to retire in the next five to seven years, we have the opportunity to strengthen and diversify our pipeline. Today, as our student population becomes increasingly diverse, the vast majority of our district- and school-level leadership does not reflect this shift. Among promising developments is a major grant from the Wallace Foundation to strengthen our education leadership programs. Given the changing nature of what defines leadership in today's schools, Delaware could set the standard for the nation if we get it right.	N/A*
STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY	High expectations and sound data must drive all decisions. Our system of standards is ranked 12th best in the nation, and we've long been a leader in this area. But in a review of our standards, national advisers clearly indicate that our state standards would be strengthened by more specificity and a better framework for the last two years of high school. Also, while our annual tests are turned around quickly, because they are only administered annually they are not as useful to informing and driving student performance as they could be.	
SCHOOL FINANCE	Although our education spending is 7th highest in the nation (\$9,072 per student), the system is complex, making it difficult to evaluate which investments are working better than others. Further, our "unit count" system, which links specific staff positions to student enrollment numbers, is so tightly structured that school principals may not have the flexibility to allocate their resources toward their greatest needs. Finally, given rapid rural and beach development in the past 20 years, many believe it is time for a property reassessment.	
SCHOOL CHOICE	Choice and flexibility are essential; one size does not fit all. We have more kinds of options than any other state in the mid-Atlantic region, including open enrollment, and we rank 3rd nationally in the percentage of students in charter schools. Although school choice is readily available, the opportunity to establish new schools is underutilized, many existing charters have waiting lists, and many parents do not fully know about all the options available.	
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	If we want to make sure that every child succeeds, we need to involve parents and families from the start. Although comparable national data are limited, Delaware appears to share the same challenges facing other states: a decline in parent engagement after elementary school; lack of adequate data to measure the level and variety of participation; and the need to involve more business leaders, clergy and other community members in supporting students. Broad-based engagement will provide the stability to allow school reform efforts to endure and to ensure that schools reflect community priorities.	N/A*

* Nationally comparable indicators are not yet available for these categories.

A QUICK LOOK AT DELAWARE

Context matters. We know from education reform efforts in states around the nation that we cannot transplant a reform effort from one state and expect it to take root automatically in another. States are different, and there are no “silver bullets.” So what makes Delaware unique?

WE ARE SMALL. Our state’s small size is a very big asset: With slightly more than 119,000 students in about 200 public schools, the entire state’s student enrollment is similar in size to some of America’s larger school districts, such as in Memphis and San Diego. We can gather an inclusive group of stakeholders from across the state and still be a small enough group to tackle the work together. Our districts also are relatively small, which reduces many of the bureaucratic and political obstacles to reform that often undermine efforts in larger settings. Half of our students attend schools in districts serving fewer than 10,000 students.

Additionally, ideas travel fast across short distances. The four largest districts in northern Delaware serve between 10,000 and 18,000 students each. Accelerating improvement in these four districts would affect roughly half the state’s total enrollment. The remaining 15 districts that serve the other half of our students are small enough that opportunities and successful practices could be shared quickly and still accommodate local needs.

WE ARE RELATIVELY DIVERSE, AND WE HAVE A DIVERSITY OF CHOICES. For a small state, our schools are relatively diverse. In 2003, our public school population was 58.5 percent white, 31.4 percent African American, 7.2 percent Hispanic, 2.6 percent Asian/Pacific Islander and 0.3 percent Native American.²

Minority enrollment has risen over the past two decades; the largest gains are among Hispanics and African Americans. Still, although 10 percent of Delaware schools have a majority of students of color, 90 percent of our schools have a majority of white students. Compared to other states, our percentages of students with disabilities and students from low-income families are about average, but we have a lower percentage of students learning English as a second language.³

Our mix of public schools includes 13 charter schools and five vocational-technical schools. State law gives parents and students the option to select any public school to attend, including schools both inside and outside their local districts. This diversity of choice is an asset that can help accelerate academic progress as children find the schools that fit them best.

WE ARE A STATE WITH A UNIQUE AND COMPLEX HISTORY. There is a physical and cultural divide in the state: A canal separates most of urban New Castle County in the north from the rapidly growing rural and beach communities of central Kent County and southern Sussex County. Delaware was impor-



tant to desegregation debates 50 years ago. As the site of one of the five landmark cases in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the city of Wilmington was in the public spotlight. The evolution to integration combined 11 small school districts into one New Castle County district, which in time was divided into the current four school districts emanating from the center so that each would have a mix of urban and suburban students.

Some argue that the long bus rides or discomfort with integration led to “white flight,” especially toward private schools, but others note that this pattern of accessing private schools was already well established. Private schooling has a long history here, with some schools founded in the mid-18th century. In 2001, we had 121 private schools in the state. One in three students in parts of New Castle County — three times the national average — attends a private school.

This issue of race and public schooling regained prominence in recent years. The Neighborhood Schools Act was passed in 2000 in an effort to reduce the length of bus rides for students and let them attend the closest available school. The concern, of course, is that this will result in more schools with high concentrations of poverty.

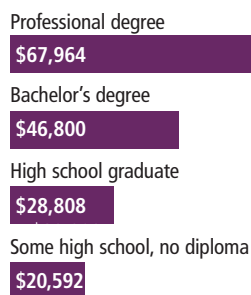
BUILDING ON THE LAST WAVE OF REFORM. Beginning in the 1990s, the Business/Public Education Council and incoming governor Tom Carper sponsored a “Gap Analysis” that led to expanded early childhood education, improved technology, and new school governance and accountability provisions. By mid-decade, the Education Improvement Commission — a mix of education, business and legislative leaders — took the Gap Analysis data and made powerful recommendations in a report called *Empowering Schools for Excellence*. As the name implies, the report asserted that the path to success was through “removing regulations that stifle improvement” and increasing the authority and flexibility at the school level. In exchange for this increased local control, the report recommended ensuring that the statewide standards were high and schools were held accountable for results.

A great deal of progress has been made in the past decade (see the timeline that follows). The list of accomplishments is long. Delaware has made headway in the following areas:

- **Early childhood education** — Delaware’s state-funded Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP) for 4-year-olds extends Head Start services to virtually all children in poverty.
- **Technology** — due to early investments, students have computer and Internet access in every school; report cards on all schools are available electronically; and all schools have live satellite feed and access to a statewide intranet.
- **Governance** — Delaware has 13 charter schools and a school choice system that offers parents a broad range of options.

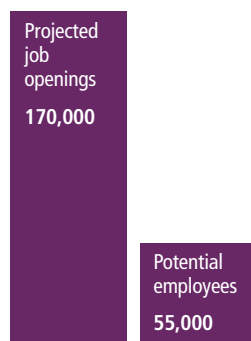


**Education Matters:
Median Earnings for Full-
Time Workers Age 25 and
Over, 2003**



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics,
March 2003.

**Pending Shortfall of
Workers, 2010**



Source: Delaware Department of Labor, 2001.

- **Accountability** — the state became an early adopter in establishing school accountability based on academic standards and assessments.
- **Recognizing what works and offering support for innovation** — Delaware has accomplished this through programs such as Delaware State Chamber of Commerce's SuperStars in Education and the Lt. Governor's Models of Excellence in Education.

Yet there remain some key recommendations in the report that are barely off the ground, including:

- the **simplification of the current education funding formula** to provide greater flexibility to school leaders for school operations;
- policies to **reward and sanction individual teachers and principals** based on performance; and
- the **use of data** to strengthen instruction and drive improvement.

This report revisits many of these issues and reports more fully on how far we have come.

WHY THIS MATTERS. More than ever, education is the ticket to success in work, citizenship and a satisfying life. Our world is relentlessly becoming more knowledge-based. While this kind of progress creates unprecedented opportunities, it also means the consequences of obtaining a poor education are growing more severe. Workers with only a high school diploma can expect to make just \$28,808 a year compared to the \$46,800 of a college graduate.⁴ And it's not just in the workplace that education matters more and more. Whether one is raising children, participating as a citizen or pursuing any number of interests, keeping pace with our fast-moving information-based society requires increasing levels of literacy and thinking skills.

The importance of education, of course, extends beyond its value to individuals; our vitality as a society depends on it. Demographic and employment statistics in Delaware raise the state of our public education system to a new level of importance. And despite a rich array of independent schools, eight out of 10 Delaware students are educated in the public schools. By 2010, labor projections show that Delaware will have 170,000 job openings — 100,000 from retirements and 70,000 from new job creation. Yet because the baby boomers will retire, we will have only 55,000 potential employees to fill that pool. This projected shortfall of 115,000 workers demands that we highly educate all of our students and that we build a public school system successful enough to attract working families to Delaware.⁵

Currently 61 percent of the jobs available in Delaware require at least some postsecondary education, and that will increase to 66 percent in 2010.⁶ We have a clear imperative to act because only 64 percent of high school students now graduate on time⁷ and only 32 percent graduate "college ready."⁸ An ill-prepared workforce will have profound implications not just for our young people but also for the health of Delaware's economy and the vitality of our communities.

IMPORTANT MILESTONES IN EDUCATION REFORM IN DELAWARE, 1981–2004

- 1981** The **New Castle County School District** is split into four smaller districts through a court-approved desegregation plan.
- 1990** **Governor Michael Castle** meets with the nation's other 49 governors and President George H. W. Bush to develop national education goals.
- 1991** The **Business/Public Education Council** is formed by business leaders across the state to support education reform. The state's 10th grade writing assessment is developed and administered for the first time.
- 1992** The **State Board of Education** adopts incoming state superintendent **Pat Forgione's** "New Directions for Education" as Delaware's education reform plan.
- 1993** **Governor Tom Carper** takes office, committing his administration to improving education in Delaware through a comprehensive long-term strategy. The first interim assessment is given to students in grades 3, 5, 8 and 10 to transition to performance-based assessments. Business leaders issue the **Delaware Gap Analysis**, which includes recommendations for education reform.
- 1994** The **Early Childhood Assistance Programs** approved by the legislature provide Head Start–like services for 4-year-olds in poverty.
- 1995** A court order is lifted as school systems are declared desegregated. The report **Empowering Schools for Excellence, the Final Report and Recommendations of Delaware's Education Improvement Commission** is released. A DSEA poll shows teacher support for the state's reform agenda, **New Directions**. Legislation passes for choice and charter schools. The State Board approves content standards in math, social studies, science and English language arts. \$30 million is set aside for the wiring of classrooms and the creation of the **Delaware Center for Education Technology**.
- 1996** The state pays for **professional development** to support districts in aligning curriculum and instruction with content standards.
- 1997** Legislation is passed mandating a state testing program, and the State Board approves the design of the **DSTP**. Legislation creates the position of **Secretary of Education**, shifting authority from a state board to the governor.
- 1998** The **Education Accountability Act** is passed, establishing the parameters for student, school, district, DOE and parent accountability. The DSTP is administered to all students in grades 3, 5, 8 and 10 in reading, writing and math. K–3 class-size legislation is approved.
- 1999** **Valerie Woodruff** is appointed acting Secretary of Education and is sworn in fully in 2000.
- 2000** The Legislature passes the **Neighborhood Schools Act**, which requires districts to assign students to schools closest to their homes. The **Professional Development and Educator Accountability Act** is approved by the Legislature.
- 2001** **School accountability ratings** are released for the first time. Reading resource teachers are provided to elementary schools with the lowest reading scores.
- 2002** Legislation allows students scoring at level 1 to be **promoted to the next grade after summer school**. **State testing (DSTP-2)** is expanded to "off grades" 2, 4, 6, 7 and 9.
- 2004** The state Legislature **funds \$1 million pilot program** for full-day kindergarten. The **Delaware Department of Education** begins an evaluation of the state's accountability system.

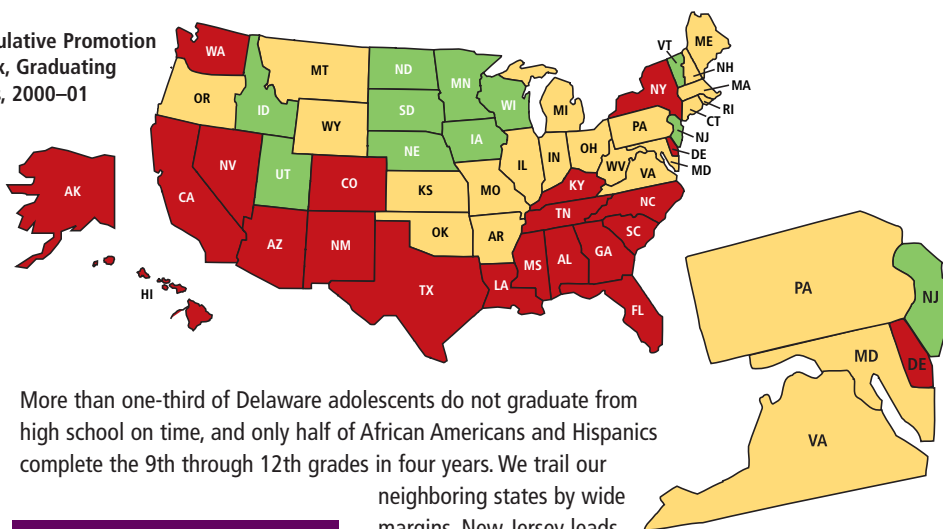


HIGH SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

We count on high school to prepare young adults for life and success in work and college. Graduating from high school is critical because youth who take challenging coursework and stay in high school through graduation are more likely to continue their schooling, stay out of jail and earn significantly higher wages. The social costs are high for young people who cannot contribute to the economy and society. The public needs a clearer picture of whether graduates are competent and ready for the next stages of life.

NATIONALLY: Graduation rates far below neighbors

Cumulative Promotion Index, Graduating Class, 2000–01



More than one-third of Delaware adolescents do not graduate from high school on time, and only half of African Americans and Hispanics complete the 9th through 12th grades in four years. We trail our neighboring states by wide margins. New Jersey leads the nation with an 86.3 percent high school graduation rate, while Pennsylvania (75.5 percent), Maryland (75.3 percent) and Virginia (73.8 percent) are near the top of the middle tier of states.⁹

LEADER STATES

(% of 9th graders who graduate in four years)

1. New Jersey 86.3%
2. Idaho 79.6%
3. South Dakota 79.4%

39. Delaware 64.3%

	% graduating from high school in 4 years				
	All students	White	African American	Hispanic	Rank
Delaware	64	68	53	42	39th
Nation	68	75	50	53	N/A
Maryland	75	80	65	71	14th
New Jersey	86	86	**	**	1st
Pennsylvania	76	81	46	41	13th
Virginia	74	76	63	65	19th

Source: Urban Institute.

** No racial breakdown reported for New Jersey.

FEW ARE READY FOR COLLEGE

A report by the **Education Commission of the States** estimates students' chances of going to college in every state. The report estimates that if the trend continues only 36 percent of Delaware students are likely to enroll in college within five years after entering 9th grade.

For every 100 9th graders ...

61 will graduate in 4 years from high school

36 will enroll in college in 5 years

Source: Education Commission of the States, 2003.

Worse still, only about 20 percent of low-income students in Delaware are likely to attend college.¹⁰

The **American Diploma Project**, led by Achieve, Inc., examined how well our college admissions and placement requirements connect to high school graduation requirements. Among its findings and policy recommendations in early 2005 were the following:

- Delaware should revise state standards to be more specific and extend beyond 9th or 10th grade content levels.
- High school content requirements should ensure that all students take courses or an integrated curriculum rigorous enough for college readiness upon graduation: four years of math (Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II, as well as data analysis and statistics) and four years of grade-level English (literature, writing, reasoning, logic and communications skills).¹¹

HIGH SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

IN DELAWARE: *State test scores rising, but gaps persist*

DSTP Reading Gaps, 2000–04

Slightly more than 71 percent of Delaware students passed the state's grade 10 reading test in 2004, a 10-percentage point gain since 2000. (By comparison, roughly 82 percent of 3rd graders, 85 percent of 5th graders and 71 percent of 8th graders passed the DSTP reading test.)¹²

As at other grade levels and in other subjects, there are significant performance gaps between groups. About 80 percent of white students passed the 10th grade test, compared to 55 percent of Hispanic students and 51 percent of African American students. These gaps have closed slightly (by 2–4 points) in the past five years.

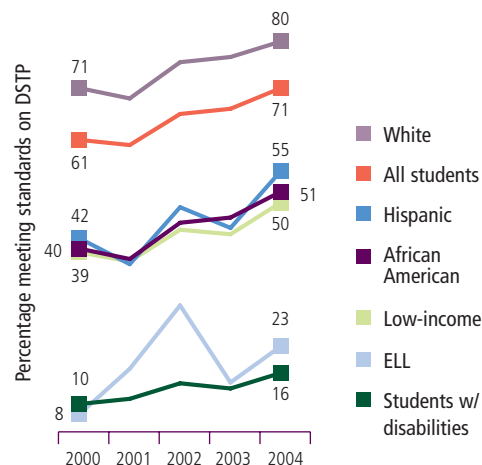
Low-income students, English language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities all have made gains on the 10th grade test. But only 50 percent of low-income students, 23 percent of ELL students and 16 percent of students with disabilities passed the test.

DSTP Mathematics Gaps, 2000–04

Student performance on the state's grade 10 math test is significantly worse than for reading; on average, only 53 percent of our 10th graders met the math standards in 2004. The good news is that this represents a 17 percentage-point improvement since 2000. (By comparison, roughly 78 percent of 3rd graders, 75 percent of 5th graders and 50 percent of 8th graders passed the DSTP math test.)¹³

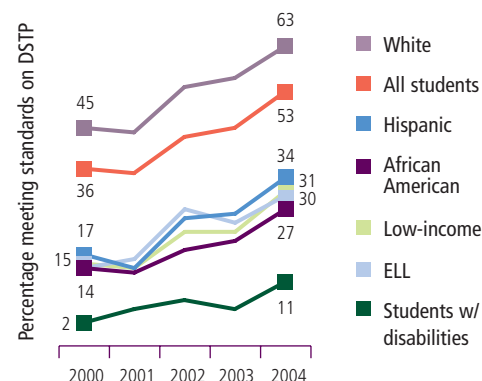
The white-minority gaps are large and growing slightly: a 36 percentage-point gap between white and African American students and a 29-point gap between white and Hispanic students. The scores of low-income students, ELL students and students with disabilities also rose in math, but the groups' passing rates are still low at 31 percent, 30 percent and 11 percent, respectively.

Grade 10 Reading



Source: DSTP.

Grade 10 Mathematics



Source: DSTP.

CHALLENGING COURSES

Although it is an imprecise measure, student participation in the Advanced Placement (AP) program offers one way of comparing curriculum offerings across states (AP courses and content-specific exams are viewed as good preparation for college and allow students to earn college credit in high school). In 2003, 17 percent of Delaware high school students took one or more AP tests and received a score of at least 3, the threshold students must meet to obtain college credit at many universities. That is a slight increase from 2000 and places Delaware 11th in the nation. All states in the region except Pennsylvania (22nd) do well on this measure. Maryland and Virginia rank 1st and 2nd nationally. In other positive news, the number of Delaware students taking an AP exam increased 16 percent in 2004, while the total number of exams taken rose 19 percent.¹⁴

	Students scoring 3 or better on AP exams		
	%, 2003	Rank, 2003	Improvement since 2000
Delaware	17	11th	4.4%
Nation	14	N/A	N/A
Maryland	25	1st	6.6%
New Jersey	20	6th	3.1%
Pennsylvania	11	22nd	1.6%
Virginia	22	2nd	2.5%

Source: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems database.

Graduation rates are low generally and lower yet for minority, ELL and low-income students and students with disabilities; college preparation is weak compared with other states; and achievement gaps between races remain significant. However, high school scores on the DSTP and AP participation have risen steadily for all groups of students.

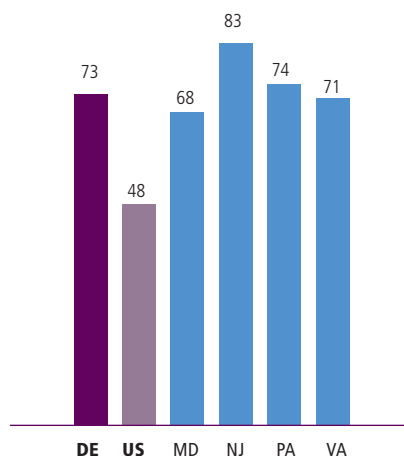


COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS: PARTICIPATION HIGH, SCORES LOW

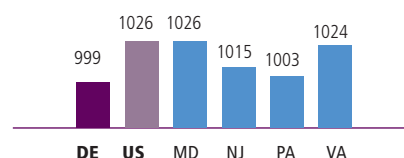
On the SAT, another measure of college readiness, Delaware students participate at high rates; 73 percent of our students take the test at least once in high school. We are 9th in the nation in participation, but lower than New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Our relatively high participation rate might help explain Delaware's very low SAT performance, where we rank 45th in the nation with a combined math and verbal score of 999.

Looking more closely at SAT scores, Delaware students' average verbal scores dipped slightly to 500 in 2004 and are lower than the national average (508). Our average math score of 499 is well below the national average of 518. All of our mid-Atlantic neighbors outscore us on the SAT, even those with higher participation rates. Nationally, 13 states nationwide have participation rates of at least 70 percent; of these, Delaware ranks 11th.¹⁵

National and Regional Comparisons
(Percentage of students taking the SAT exam, 2004)



(Composite verbal and math score on SAT, 2004)



Source: College Board.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Some districts require all 9th grade students to take the **Pre-SAT** (or PSAT) as a measure of their potential to handle more difficult coursework.

Schools and districts also are working to increase their student participation in more rigorous courses such as **Advanced Placement (AP)** and **International Baccalaureate (IB)** programs.

The **Delaware Department of Education** is compiling a database of information for AP programs in schools and has established programs to increase the participation of low-income and minority students in AP activities.

The **State Board of Education** held a summit on school reform in spring 2005. This event involved proactive discussions among local and national experts on how we can dramatically improve our middle and high schools.

High school educators worry that schools are held accountable for student performance, but DSTP scores have no effect on student grades, promotion or graduation, and 10th grade students in particular don't take the tests seriously. The challenges ahead are to make sure a high school diploma is contingent on performance, that students have an incentive to do their best, and that any tests used in this fashion are designed well enough to warrant such high stakes. As we pursue clear and rigorous expectations, we will need to guard against inadvertently increasing the dropout rate.

If we want **to be among the best in the nation**, we need to understand the root causes of our low graduation rates, meaning we will need better data about how some students succeed and why others do not. We can learn from other states how to make high-quality curriculum universal, increase access to established college-preparatory programs such as AP and IB courses, and design new kinds of high schools that work better for students who are currently dropping out.

All of our students will need to graduate with high-level content under their belts, competent in transitioning to work or postsecondary education. And students will need better preparation in the earlier grades to succeed in high school.

DELAWARE VOICES

"The number one goal is significant elimination of the graduation gap. We should all be shocked about that gap."

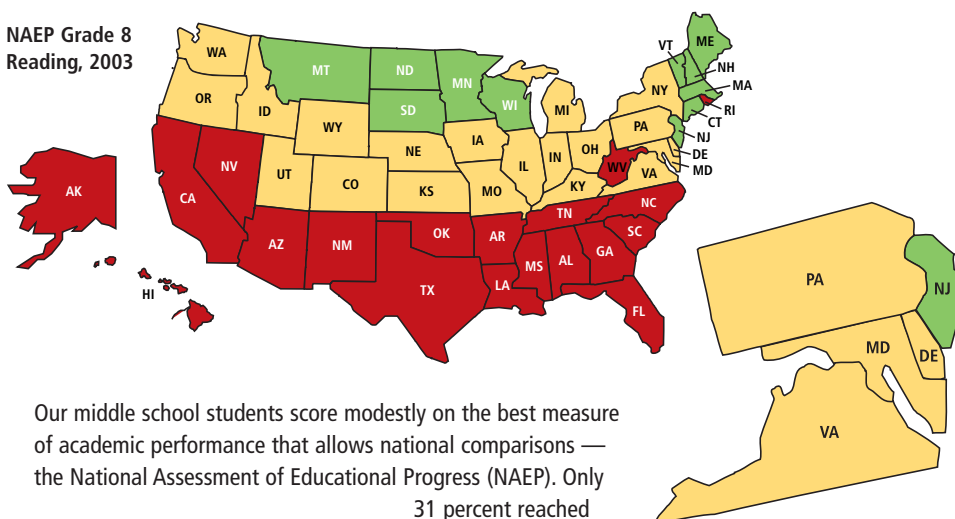
— Business Leader

MIDDLE SCHOOL READING

Students improve their reading comprehension skills and learn to write — two essential skills for lifetime literacy — in middle school. Those who perform well in challenging courses in middle school also are much more likely to graduate from high school and go on to some kind of postsecondary education. This is a critical developmental stage because students who are less successful in middle school begin to disengage and run the risk of dropping out. All young adolescents need close school ties, engaging studies and adults who know them well if they are to become truly literate.

NATIONALLY: *Despite gains, we rank 30th*

NAEP Grade 8 Reading, 2003



Our middle school students score modestly on the best measure of academic performance that allows national comparisons — the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Only 31 percent reached the proficient level on the NAEP reading test in 2003, which put us 30th nationally.

LEADER STATES

(% of students scoring proficient or above)

1. Massachusetts 43%
 2. New Hampshire 40%
 3. South Dakota 39%
-
30. Delaware 31%

All of our neighboring states except Maryland, with which we are tied, outperform us. New Jersey ranks 6th in the United States, with 37 percent of its students proficient or above.¹⁶

	Status (2003)		Trends (1998–2003)
	% proficient or advanced	Rank	NAEP score gains/losses
Delaware	31	30th	+ 8 pts
Nation	30	N/A	0
Maryland	31	30th	0
New Jersey	37	6th	N/A
Pennsylvania	32	26th	N/A
Virginia	36	12th	+ 3 pts

Source: NAEP.

LARGE WHITE-MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Our students' achievement varies greatly by race and ethnicity. White students in Delaware outperform African American students by 27 percentage points on the NAEP reading test; New Jersey and Virginia have slightly larger gaps. Our white-Hispanic gap also is 27 points, but this gap is much smaller in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

Since 1998, however, our scores have increased more than any other state in the region (New Jersey and Pennsylvania declined to participate in NAEP for one or more of the years studied here).

NAEP Reading Gaps, 2003

National and Regional Comparisons
(Percentage of students scoring at or above proficient)

Delaware



Nation



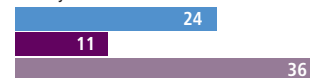
Maryland



New Jersey



Pennsylvania



Virginia



■ Hispanic ■ African American ■ White

Source: NAEP.

Improved NAEP reading scores have pulled Delaware (barely) into the middle tier of states, and DSTP scores also have moved in the right direction. But far too few of our minority, disabled and limited English students are proficient readers in the middle grades.



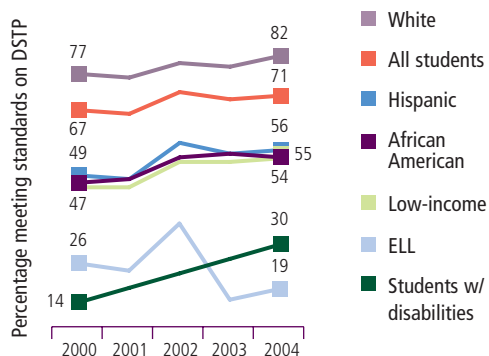
IN DELAWARE: *Reading scores inch upward for all races but not all student groups*

On the 2004 DSTP grade 8 reading test, 71 percent of our students met the standards, up 4 percentage points since 2000. During that time, the gaps between white and nonwhite students closed slightly. The gaps now are 28 points (down from 30) between whites and African Americans and 26 points (down from 28) between whites and Hispanics.

The scores of other middle school groups show that our average score obscures the achievement gaps that all states face. We have to do more to help students with disabilities and who are economically disadvantaged; English language learners' 2003 scores in reading dropped significantly. We need high-quality programs in the upper grades in all districts to enable immigrants to perform complex writing and learn science and social studies in English.¹⁷

DSTP Reading Gaps, 2000–04

Grade 8



Source: DSTP.

Note: In Delaware, as in many other states, scores on the state proficiency test tend to be much higher than scores on the NAEP test, where the definitions for “proficiency” are set higher. In middle school reading, for example, 71 percent of students are proficient on the DSTP, but only 31 percent meet the performance level of the NAEP.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

A sharp focus on reading skills among young people in the middle grades would go a long way toward increased achievement and graduation rates in the years ahead. Several Delaware districts offer program supports such as **Accelerated Reader**, while others are encouraging schools to change how time is allocated so students have more focused chances to read, such as by providing a schoolwide sustained silent reading period for 30- to 60-minute blocks each day.

Efforts to improve reading instruction include state funds to extend the federally funded **Reading First** programs and teacher training through the **Success for Secondary Struggling Readers** initiative. On the horizon are state plans to develop recommended curriculum and materials for use by districts and schools.

DELAWARE VOICES

“The truth is we leave millions of kids behind because they’re so different from one another. Have we done a good enough job to determine what affects their opportunity to learn?”

— State Policy Leader

“I don’t know if I am going to be as well educated ... as my friends in other places will be.”

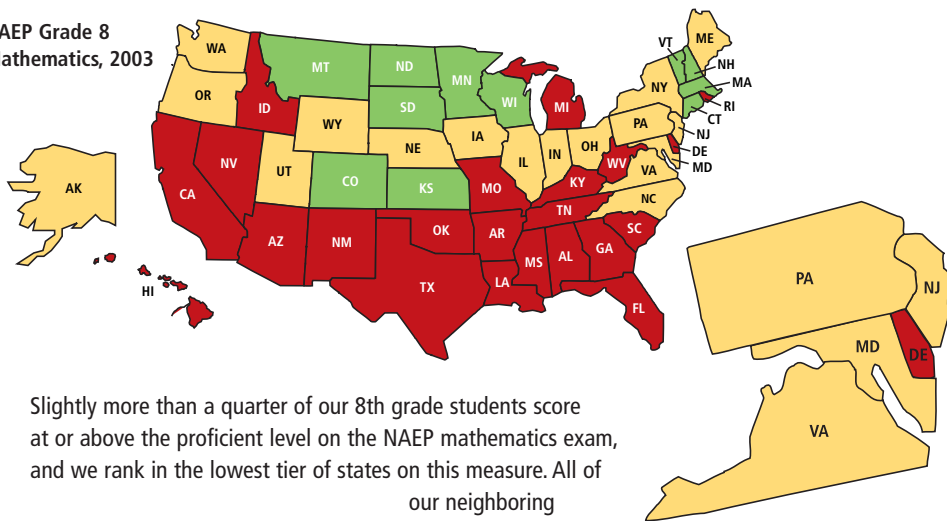
— Student

MIDDLE SCHOOL MATHEMATICS

Middle school youth need to go beyond simple computation and learn to apply higher-level math skills. Those who take upper-level math classes in the middle grades, starting with Algebra, are then prepared to take challenging math and science courses in high school. These courses, in turn, make it much more likely that students will attend and graduate from college and be prepared for good-paying, satisfying jobs in the future.

NATIONALLY: *We rank 33rd but are improving*

NAEP Grade 8
Mathematics, 2003



Slightly more than a quarter of our 8th grade students score at or above the proficient level on the NAEP mathematics exam, and we rank in the lowest tier of states on this measure. All of

our neighboring states had better scores in 2003.

Although none made the top 10, the regional pace was set by New Jersey (33 percent proficient or above, ranked 12th in the United States).

As in the elementary grades, Delaware has improved significantly; only nine states had a faster rate of improvement in 8th grade mathematics between 1990 and 2003.¹⁸

LEADER STATES

(% of students scoring proficient or above)

1. Minnesota	44%
2. Massachusetts	38%
3. North Dakota	36%
33. Delaware	26%

	Status (2003)		Trends (1990–2003)
	% proficient or advanced	Rank	NAEP score gains/losses
Delaware	26	33rd	+ 12 pts
Nation	27	N/A	+ 12 pts
Maryland	30	24th	+ 10 pt
New Jersey	33	12th	+ 12 pts
Pennsylvania	30	24th	+ 13 pts
Virginia	31	20th	+ 14 pts

Source: NAEP.

ACHIEVEMENT GAPS ARE LARGE

Achievement varies greatly by race and ethnicity. Delaware's white students outperform African American students by 27 percentage points on the NAEP math test (35 percent proficient compared to only 8 percent); all of our neighboring states have larger gaps, especially New Jersey (35-point gap). Our Hispanic achievement gap is 24 points, smaller than all neighboring states' gaps except Virginia's (23 points).

NAEP Mathematics Gaps, 2003

National and Regional Comparisons
(Percentage of students scoring at or above proficient)

Delaware



Nation



Maryland



New Jersey



Pennsylvania



Virginia



■ Hispanic ■ African American ■ White

Source: NAEP.

Although Delaware students score poorly compared to other states, their NAEP math scores have improved. Their DSTP math scores also have gone up over time, but a low starting point and slower improvement pace for some groups of middle grade students will require more school, district and state attention. We need a better understanding of why math performance drops so much between elementary and middle school.



IN DELAWARE:

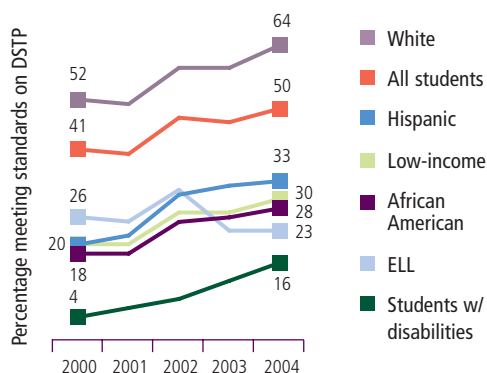
Steady improvement for some, but disadvantaged trail

On the DSTP grade 8 math tests, only half of our students met the standards, up 9 percentage points from 2000. That's 21 points lower than 8th graders posted on the state's reading standards. The African American achievement gap has widened slightly from 34 points to 36, and the Hispanic gap has narrowed very slightly in the past five years, from 32 to 31 percentage points. These gaps remain huge and underscore the reality that roughly two-thirds of minority students do not meet state math standards.

Math scores are lower than reading scores across the board in the middle grades. Even more alarming is the very limited achievement posted by students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL) and economically disadvantaged youth. Disabled and disadvantaged students have made slight improvements over time, but we had a significant dip in ELL student performance between 2002 and 2004.¹⁹

DSTP Mathematics Gaps, 2000–04

Grade 8



Source: DSTP.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

In 2005, in response to **Governor Minner's Executive Order 54**, a panel of experts analyzed our state's math standards and assessments. The report underscored the need to spell out more clearly expectations and standards in math so that students (and teachers) know what to work toward. Such an effort could go hand-in-hand with state plans to develop recommended curriculum and materials.

Recognizing the state's weak grade 8 math performance, the governor's FY 2006 budget proposal included funding for **Middle School Math Specialists** in 22 low-performing middle schools.

A critical **shortage of secondary school math teachers** may be the biggest threat to students' ability to succeed in math as they move through adolescence.

DELAWARE VOICES

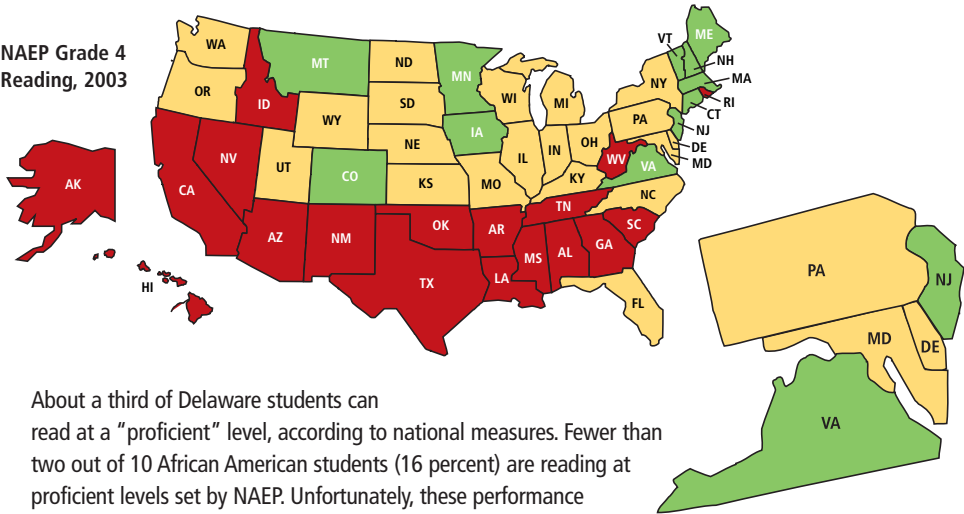
"Math is the biggest problem because teachers need to be able to teach something they didn't experience: challenging math ideas from the early grades right on through. Students used to add and subtract and maybe see a square root here and there; then in 8th grade, suddenly they get algebra."

— State Policy Leader

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL READING

Reading is essential to learning. It is the pathway to learning throughout life and a key to opportunity. Reading is not only a basic skill; it is an indispensable tool for critical and creative thinking. Literacy allows students to make connections between their own and others’ experiences and to access, analyze, synthesize and critically evaluate information. Early reading achievement is a reliable predictor of later school performance.

NATIONALLY: Moderate performance, but fastest gains in United States



About a third of Delaware students can read at a “proficient” level, according to national measures. Fewer than two out of 10 African American students (16 percent) are reading at proficient levels set by NAEP. Unfortunately, these performance levels are consistent with national trends.

LEADER STATES

- (% of students scoring proficient or above)
- 1. Connecticut 43%
 - 2. Massachusetts 40%
 - 3. New Hampshire 40%
 - 16. Delaware 33%

Delaware ranks 16th in the nation, with 33 percent of our students at or above proficiency. New Jersey, with 39 percent of students reaching proficient levels, ranks 4th in the nation, and Virginia ranks 9th (35 percent). Other neighboring states have similar performance levels; we are tied with Pennsylvania and slightly ahead of Maryland. Delaware should, however, be recognized for making some of the fastest gains in the country. The state’s improvement in reading between 1992 and 2003 is the highest in the nation.²⁰

	Status (2003)		Trends (1990–2003)
	% proficient or advanced	Rank	NAEP score gains/losses
Delaware	33	16th	+ 9 pts
Nation	30	N/A	+ 3 pts
Maryland	32	25th	+ 8 pts
New Jersey	39	4th	+ 4 pts
Pennsylvania	33	16th	+ 2 pts
Virginia	35	9th	+ 4 pts

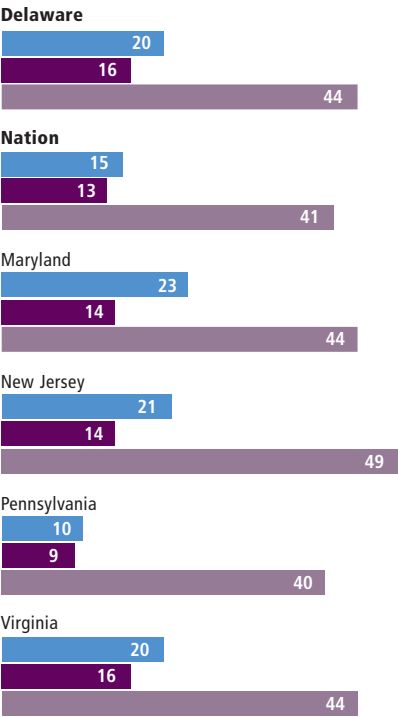
Source: NAEP.

ACHIEVEMENT GAPS ARE LARGE

Achievement in Delaware varies greatly by race and ethnicity. White students outperform African American students by 28 percentage points on the NAEP reading test (44 percent proficient or higher compared to 16 percent); all of our neighboring states have slightly larger gaps, except Virginia, whose gap is the same as ours. The Hispanic gap is 24 points, the same as Virginia’s, but smaller than New Jersey’s (28 points).

NAEP Reading Gaps, 2003

National and Regional Comparisons
(Percentage of students scoring at or above proficient)



Hispanic African American White

Source: NAEP.

We compare favorably and are improving faster in elementary school reading than in any other grade or subject. Achievement gaps are closing, and if we can continue to accelerate progress we can be among the best in the nation.



IN DELAWARE: *Elementary students are more proficient in reading and gaps are closing*

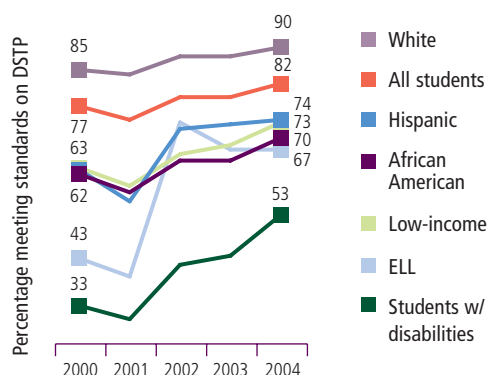
The majority of our grade 3 students are learning to read. Eighty-two percent of these students meet the reading standards on the DSTP, up 5 percentage points since 2000. Although the gaps have closed slightly in the past five years, white students outperform African Americans by 20 points and Hispanics by 16 points.

On the DSTP grade 5 reading test, 85 percent of our students meet the standards, up 15 points since 2000. African American students have made even faster gains in the past five years (25 points), but they remain 18 points behind white students. Hispanic students also have made impressive gains (28 points), but they still score 8 points lower than white students.

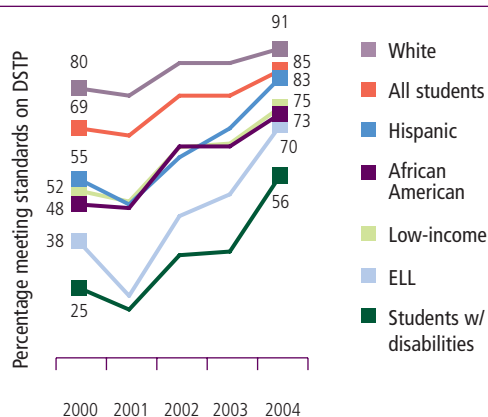
In addition, more than two-thirds of grade 3 English language learners are reaching reading proficiency (67 percent) and are keeping pace in grade 5 (70 percent in 2004). Students with disabilities are faring worse, though, as only about half are reaching proficiency in grades 3 (53 percent) and 5 (56 percent).²¹

DSTP Reading Gaps, 2000-04

Grade 3



Grade 5



Source: DSTP.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Throughout Delaware's schools and districts, educators have dedicated significant time and resources to improving student literacy. The interventions vary by school and district, with some implementing sustained silent reading or specific reading programs such as **Success for All** or **Accelerated Reader**.

Delaware provides additional funding to extend the reach of the federal **Reading First** program, through which **Reading Coaches** have been added to schools and a statewide **Reading Cadre** ensures opportunities to discuss best practices and organize support for elementary reading.

Also, a **recommended curriculum** in English language arts, math, science and social studies is in the works, with state leaders working to have it implemented by 2007.

The state's **extraordinary progress in elementary reading** deserves some more scrutiny: How did it happen? And what can we learn from the experience that could inform our efforts to raise middle school and high school achievement?

DELAWARE VOICES

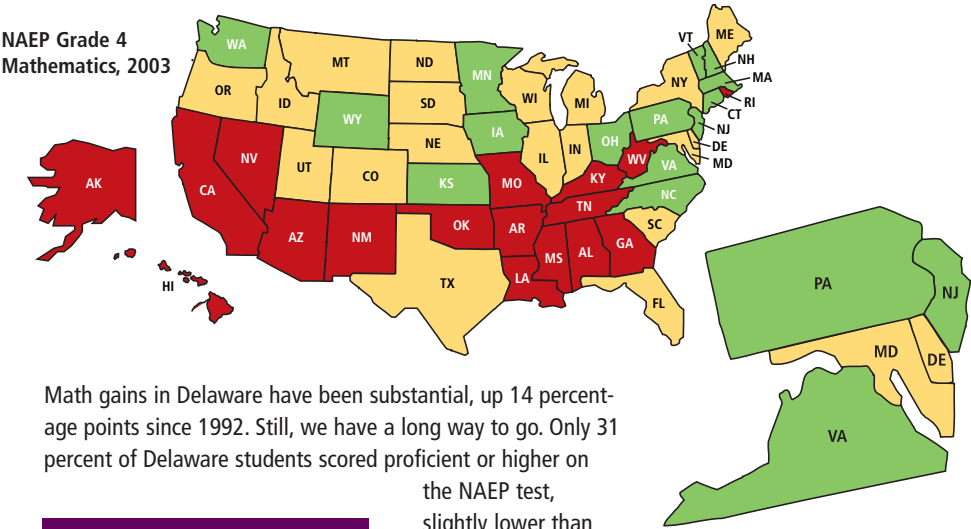
"We will have succeeded by 2012 if we don't have to use disaggregated data anymore because the gaps have closed — two years before the federal requirement."

— Business Leader

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MATHEMATICS

Elementary school mathematics is vital because it helps children think logically and precisely. It is a building block for other subjects such as science and economics, and it is essential for performing everyday tasks such as buying and selling goods or preparing food. Students performing at the proficient level should be able to use whole numbers to estimate, compute and determine whether results are reasonable. They should have a conceptual understanding of fractions and decimals; be able to apply problem-solving strategies to solve real-world problems; and use calculators and rulers appropriately.

NATIONALLY: *Middling performance, but strong gains*



Math gains in Delaware have been substantial, up 14 percentage points since 1992. Still, we have a long way to go. Only 31 percent of Delaware students scored proficient or higher on

the NAEP test, slightly lower than in reading. That places us at 28th in the nation, tied with Maryland but well behind our other neighbors: New Jersey (39 percent proficient or above, 8th in the United States) and Pennsylvania and Virginia (both with 36 percent proficiency, ranked 10th). Delaware has improved as fast as or faster than all our neighbors except Virginia, which gained 17 points since 1992.²²

LEADER STATES
(% of students scoring proficient or above)

1. New Hampshire	43%
2. Minnesota	42%
3. Vermont	42%
28. Delaware	31%

	Status (2003)		Trends (1990–2003)
	% proficient or advanced	Rank	NAEP score gains/losses
Delaware	31	28th	+ 14 pts
Nation	31	N/A	+ 14 pts
Maryland	31	28th	+ 13 pts
New Jersey	39	8th	+ 14 pts
Pennsylvania	36	10th	+ 14 pts
Virginia	36	10th	+ 17 pts

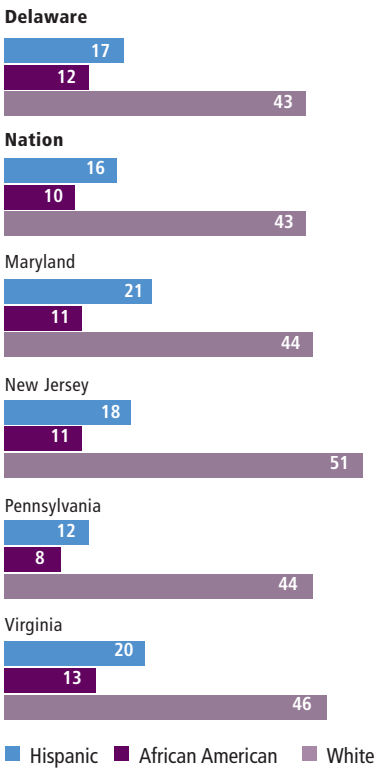
Source: NAEP.

ACHIEVEMENT GAPS ARE LARGE

Achievement in Delaware varies greatly by race and ethnicity. White students in Delaware outperform African American students by 31 percentage points on the NAEP math test (43 percent proficient compared to 12 percent). This means that nonwhite students are at least two years behind their white peers.²³

Closing these gaps is a widespread challenge, as evidenced by our neighboring states, which all have larger gaps. Our Hispanic gap is 26 points, the same as Virginia's, but smaller than New Jersey's (33 points) and Pennsylvania's (32 points).

NAEP Mathematics Gaps, 2003
National and Regional Comparisons
(Percentage of students scoring at or above proficient)



Source: NAEP.

Improvement efforts are beginning to add up in math for Delaware's elementary school students as test scores are up across the board. Yet achievement gaps between student groups remain substantial.



IN DELAWARE: *Steady progress and gaps are closing*

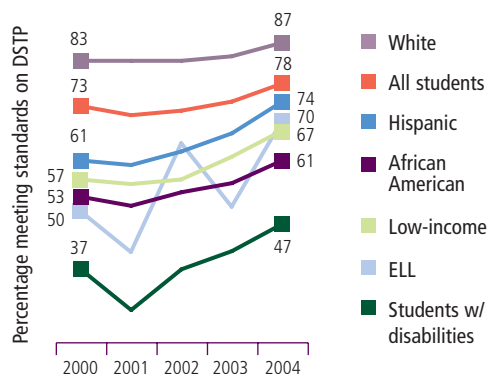
Overall, the percentage of grade 3 students who meet our standards on the DSTP math achievement test has increased from 73 in 2000 to 78 in 2004. White students have made the smallest gain, and the gaps between white and nonwhite students have begun to close but remain large: 26 percentage points between whites and African Americans and 13 points between whites and Hispanics.

Overall, the percentage of grade 5 students meeting standards on the DSTP has increased from 62 percent in 2000 to 75 percent in 2004. All groups of students are making gains. Although the gaps have closed between 7 and 10 points in the past five years, they remain large between white and nonwhite students: 27 points between whites and African Americans and 13 points between whites and Hispanics.

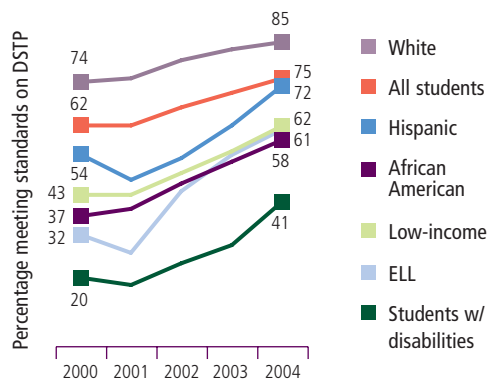
Students with disabilities, learning to speak English or living in poverty also perform significantly below their peers — on both the NAEP and DSTP tests. For example, they met Delaware's 5th grade math standards in 2003 at only 29 percent, 54 percent and 55 percent, respectively.²⁴

DSTP Mathematics Gaps, 2000–04

Grade 3



Grade 5



Source: DSTP.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The **Delaware Department of Education** in 2004 began designing a proposed scope and sequence to reduce the variation in curricular approaches from school to school and, ideally, to improve the consistency of performance across the state.

Since 2002, a number of **elementary schools** have consistently decreased the gaps between majority and minority students on the DSTP; their strategies should be disseminated across all of Delaware's elementary schools.

DELAWARE VOICES

"We need to be able to teach math ideas early and well, before kids are ready for formulas."

—State Leader

"Elementary, middle and high school principals don't talk to one another, and they have no way to know the strengths of the incoming students or even what they were taught."

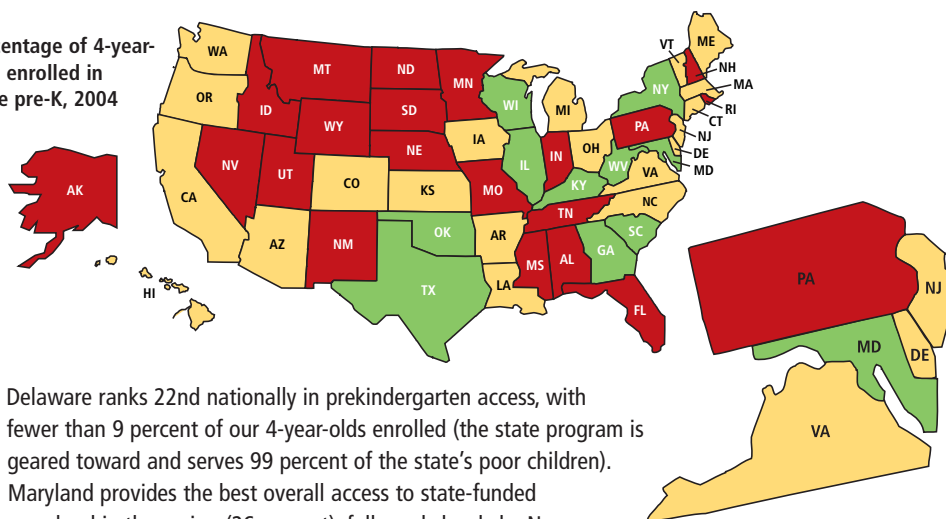
—Community Leader

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND KINDERGARTEN

Starting school ready to learn has many benefits for young children and for our communities. Children today are expected to arrive at school ready to perform a multitude of tasks, ranging from knowing the alphabet and counting from one to 10 to recognizing color and shape. Brain development is most rapid in the early years as children build both the “know what” and the “know how.” Those who start 1st grade unprepared for learning may never catch up. Services that influence whether a child is ready for school include access to high-quality preschool and an opportunity to attend full-day kindergarten.²⁵

NATIONALLY: *Only one in 10 has access to state pre-K programs*

Percentage of 4-year-olds enrolled in state pre-K, 2004



Delaware ranks 22nd nationally in prekindergarten access, with fewer than 9 percent of our 4-year-olds enrolled (the state program is geared toward and serves 99 percent of the state's poor children).

Maryland provides the best overall access to state-funded preschool in the region (26 percent), followed closely by New

Jersey (24 percent). Virginia ranked 24th (6 percent), and Pennsylvania trailed the region with fewer than 2 percent of 4-year-olds enrolled.

LEADER STATES

(NIEER Access ranking, 2004)

1. Oklahoma	59%
2. Georgia	54%
3. Texas	43%
22. Delaware	9%

When state programs supplement federal programs such as Head Start, the reach of prekindergarten programs can be greatly expanded. Oklahoma, for instance, is able to offer early learning opportunities to more than 82 percent of the children in the state, and each of the top seven states reaches at least half of all their 4-year-olds.²⁶

VOLUNTARY FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Nearly all 5-year-old children in America attend kindergarten, and more than 60 percent are in a full-day program.²⁷

Delaware school districts are required to offer at least half-day kindergarten, and most districts provide full-day programs for at least some at-risk children. Twenty-three percent of Delaware's kindergarten students (1,640 of 7,175 kindergarteners) were in full-day programs in 2003–04.²⁸

Several Delaware districts serving significant numbers of students in poverty sponsor voluntary full-day kindergarten programs for all children, and other districts plan to follow suit.

	State Programs 2004		All Programs 2004
	Access for 4-year olds	Rank	Access for 4-year-olds
Delaware	9%	22nd	25%
Nation	16%	N/A	34%
Maryland	26%	8th	40%
New Jersey	24%	11th	35%
Pennsylvania	2%	37th	19%
Virginia	6%	24th	20%

Source: NIEER.

Our current investment in early learning opportunities for 4-year-olds sets the stage for success among low-income students in elementary school. Building on the examples of other states, we could provide enrichment programs for 3-year-olds and offer voluntary full-day kindergarten to all students.



IN DELAWARE: *First steps ...*

While parents strive to guide children's growth and development in the home, state and local governments bear primary responsibility for classroom-based education. Like other states, Delaware has a wide range of services and programs, which are offered by multiple providers and financed by a mix of federal funds, state funds, grants and fees. As a result, there can be substantial variation in quality from one service provider to the next. Programs typically pay low hourly wages and experience limited public oversight.

Delaware's state-funded program for 4-year-olds, Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP), extends Head Start services to virtually all eligible children. ECAP provided \$5,287 per child in 2003–04, and funding for the program will increase by more than \$440,000 in 2005. It includes five of six elements of quality touted in a recent federal analysis: high teacher-child ratio, small class size, expanded services, parental involvement and adoption of school readiness standards.²⁹ Similarly, an annual prekindergarten yearbook found that our state programs feature seven of 10 quality standards, including a requirement that teachers meet specialized training requirements.³⁰

A baseline study of Delaware's programs in 2002 found that average wages were \$8.91 per hour (\$18,540 per year), and more than one-fifth of teachers interviewed had at least one other job. Fees for preschool for children ages 3 to 5 averaged nearly \$100 per day for full-day center-based programs and slightly less for family child care arrangements.³¹

... Next steps

A 2000 study confirms what national reports find: Disabled students and those living in poverty perform better in school after quality early care programs than do similar youngsters who do not participate in early care programs.³²

A more recent report in 2005 quantifies the savings of universal preschool per dollar invested at \$2 to \$4 in decreased special education costs, lower crime rates and a more productive workforce. In fact, the report predicts that the study state (California) will break even on its early learning investment by the time each child enrolled in the program reaches age 14.³³

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The governor has formed a **P–20 Council**, which will develop recommendations and report semiannually on more holistic education policies that cover early learning through K–12 to higher education. The council will draw on the findings of a statewide early learning task force established in the 2003 legislative session, which recommended the state analyze the current status of full-day kindergarten and fund its expansion over time.

The statewide **Early Childhood Education Task Force** in 2004 recommended that Delaware provide the resources to become the 10th state to require universal access to full-day kindergarten. The Legislature approved the governor's request to set aside \$1 million for full-day pilot programs beginning in 2004.

The United Way of Delaware has identified early childhood education as a critical need and is developing a statewide task-force to address the issue.

Social Venture Partners Delaware supports high-quality early childhood education programs for low-income and poverty-level children in Delaware. Its concept of giving is based on the venture capital model that provides both financial investments and partner expertise to support local programs.

Under the auspices of the Family and Workplace Connection, Delaware is piloting **STARS for Early Success** (Standards, Training, Assistance, Resources and Support), which will provide financial incentives and apply rigorous performance standards to early care providers to build their capacity and promote continuous improvement.

DELAWARE VOICES

"Make sure there are quality preschool and kindergarten programs so kids who are already behind the eight ball get a chance to catch up."

— *Community Organization Leader*

"We need a clear agenda for what's next. Without a common vision, we're not going to get the structural things or sub-issues done except on a piecemeal basis. We lack that coherent vision."

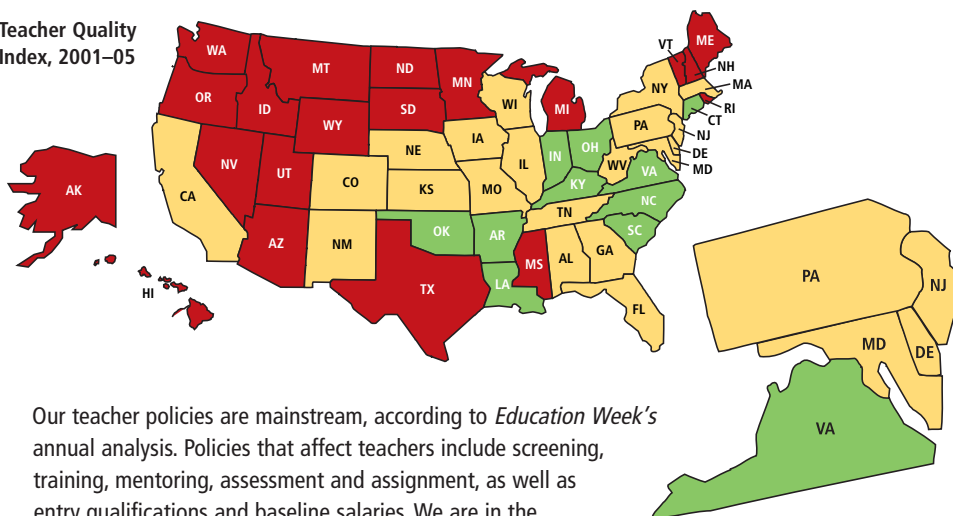
— *Policy Leader*

TEACHER QUALITY

Good teaching is the most important in-school factor in improving student achievement. New studies reveal that students' performance lags when they are taught by lower-quality teachers — an effect which is compounded over time. Furthermore, our current pool of teachers is likely to be a significant part of the next crop of principals and superintendents. To enlist a strong cadre of teachers in the years ahead, we must recruit and retain the best and brightest. If we want to elevate the system as a whole, getting the highest-quality people in the system at the start and keeping them are critical.

NATIONALLY: *Middle of the pack, behind neighbors*

Teacher Quality Index, 2001–05



Our teacher policies are mainstream, according to *Education Week's* annual analysis. Policies that affect teachers include screening, training, mentoring, assessment and assignment, as well as entry qualifications and baseline salaries. We are in the

middle tier of states on this measure. Currently ranked 27th, we dropped from 20th in 2004. All states in the region rank higher: Virginia, 10th; New Jersey, 13th; Maryland, 18th; and Pennsylvania, 22nd.³⁴

The leader states (1) hold higher education accountable for quality, (2) require teachers' knowledge of content, and (3) measure subject matter and specific pedagogy. The top state (Louisiana) ties teacher evaluation to student achievement.

LEADER STATES

(*Education Week's Quality Counts*, 2005)

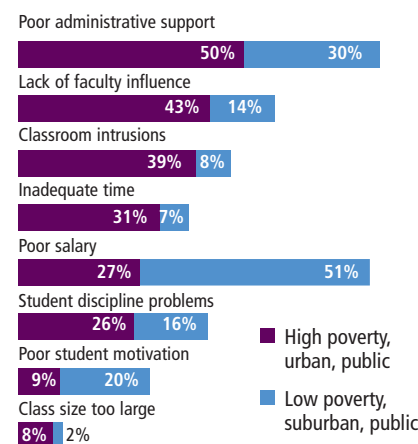
1. Louisiana	93
2. South Carolina	92
3. Connecticut	91
27. Delaware	74

	Status 2005		Trends 2001–05
	Index score/grade	Rank	Changes in score
Delaware	74	27th	+ 5 pts
Maryland	79	18th	+ 6 pts
New Jersey	81	13th	+ 10 pts
Pennsylvania	76	22nd	+ 6 pts
Virginia	85	10th	+ 10 pts

Source: *Education Week, Quality Counts*, 2005.

WHY TEACHERS LEAVE

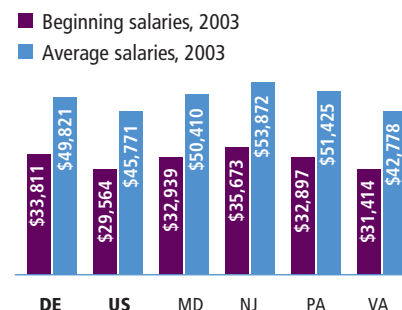
Teacher turnover affects every sector of education. In almost every case, teachers leaving the profession exceed those moving within or across districts — even in private schools, which have a 13 percent turnover rate nationally, compared to 8 percent in public schools. If we are to stem the tide of turnover, we must understand why teachers are dissatisfied. Low salaries are the top issue in low-poverty suburban schools, whereas poor administrative support ranks as the most important in high-poverty urban schools.



Source: Richard Ingersoll, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), 2001.³⁵

TEACHER SALARIES INCREASING

Delaware teaching salaries are increasing for novice and experienced teachers, outpacing the national average and keeping pace with other states in the region. Aside from Virginia, which has the lowest salaries across the board among our surrounding states, the gap between beginning and average salaries in the region ranges from \$15,000 (US average) to more than \$18,000 (in Pennsylvania).



Source: *Education Week, Quality Counts*, 2005.



IN DELAWARE: *Who are our teachers?*

Demographics: Between 2002 and 2004, the average number of Delaware public school teachers was about 7,700. Three-quarters of our teachers are women, 87 percent are white and 11 percent are African American. The number of minority and male teachers has declined slightly, especially in Kent and New Castle counties. Of the 819 new teachers in 2003, 14 percent are African American and 3 percent are male.³⁶

Who Our Teachers Are



Qualifications: Researchers define “qualified” in many ways. The state reported in 2004 that 85 percent of Delaware’s teachers were highly qualified, as defined by NCLB.³⁷ An earlier national study found only 55 percent of secondary classes in core academic subjects were taught by teachers with a major in their subject area.³⁸

A report from 2003 found 8.4 percent of Delaware teachers were working without certification on waivers. That was higher than the previous year (6.9 percent) and the national average (5.6 percent). Of those teachers on waivers, 9.0 percent were teaching in high-poverty districts (again, above the national average of 7.8 percent).³⁹ However, many of Delaware’s teachers with waivers are enrolled in the state’s Alternative Route to Certification program (ARTC), which meets the NCLB requirements for highly qualified teachers.

Hiring: Delaware’s schools often lose talented candidates to neighboring states because of hiring policies that include late hiring. In 2003–04, more than two-thirds of Delaware’s new teachers were hired in August or later (an improvement from 2002 when three-fourths of new teachers were hired late).⁴⁰ The voluntary transfer process, which allows senior teachers their first choice of schools after a vacancy has been identified, has a ripple effect that further delays filling all vacancies.

Like most states, Delaware is struggling to retain new teachers. District administrators report that special education, technology, and high school math and science teachers are the hardest to find. While new teachers make up the largest percentage of teachers in the state, nearly half of Delaware’s teachers leave within five years, and one-third leave the profession in their first two years.⁴¹ Although this is typical of national patterns, the costs and disruptions associated with constant turnover are high.

Teachers report that salary is important but the climate in which they work matters more. Induction programs, with mentors in the same subject area and a nearby classroom, make a difference in whether or not teachers stay. Professional development and collegial work to improve achievement are factors that appear to help in teacher retention.⁴²

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Research indicates that participation in Delaware’s **New Teacher Mentoring Program** benefits both novice teachers and their mentors.

The state is revising the **Delaware Performance Appraisal System (DPAS)** that currently is used to evaluate teachers. The revised version, DPAS II, will link teacher performance with five factors, including student achievement data (20 percent of the evaluation). The state recently approved regulations for a pilot system that ties teacher evaluation (not pay) to standardized tests. Two districts will pilot the program beginning fall 2005.

Only 13 Delaware districts have a **recruitment budget**, and the budgets range from \$1,000 to \$50,000 per year (only two districts have a budget greater than \$10,000).

Several districts are posting job openings early (April–May) to avoid late hiring. We also have a statewide posting system known as “**Teach Delaware**” that could be put to better use, as districts tend to recruit independently.

Delaware is one of many states promoting teacher professionalism by offering incentives to teachers who engage in the **National Board certification** process. The number of National Board–certified teachers has increased to 250, roughly 3 percent of Delaware teachers and three times the national average.⁴³

Delaware has joined the **Teachers Network Leadership Institute (TNLI)**, a national initiative comprising hundreds of teachers from 12 nationwide affiliates that connect education policy with classroom practice to improve student achievement.

DELAWARE VOICES

“There’s a perception of a teacher shortage, but it’s the structure of funding and employment that’s the problem. Districts have to wait until they know how many students there will be, and it is especially hard on small school systems that don’t have the funding support to cover a mistake. So they wait until September 30 to determine how many teachers they’ll need.”

— Higher Education Leader

“Having a state test and high standards is turning out to be a good thing. I see teachers working harder, smarter and better, and those teachers who didn’t want to do the work are finally leaving the profession.”

— Teacher

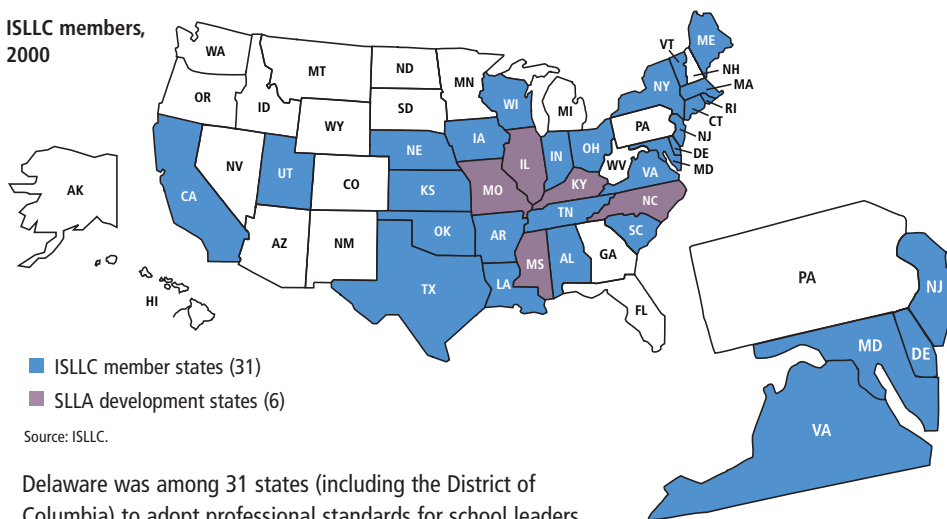
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

After teachers, local leadership is most crucial to improving achievement or making an impact on any school reform agenda. Leaders need to have the power and capacity to lead. This translates into greater influence over how school resources and teachers align with a given school mission and over resources focused on raising student achievement and closing the achievement gap. As most of our future school leaders will come from the current ranks of teachers, we should begin to develop strong leadership early. Delaware should work to recruit the best principals it can to take our schools to their highest-performing levels.

Leadership is one of the toughest characteristics to measure, and we do not have national comparisons for how Delaware compares across states. The field of school leadership is about where teaching quality was five years ago, when education analysts were not ready to spell out what makes a good environment for teaching quality (now there's little hesitation). In our view, reaching our vision in 2012 will mean having a deep pool of visionary leaders who have the right mix of instructional know-how and entrepreneurial spirit to create a system of great schools. Without national indicators on leadership, the field is open; Delaware has the opportunity to help frame the discourse for the nation. We are confident that, with all the work being done on leadership in this state, Delaware can help set national benchmarks.

NATIONALLY: *Early developers of leadership standards*

ISLLC members, 2000



Source: ISLLC.

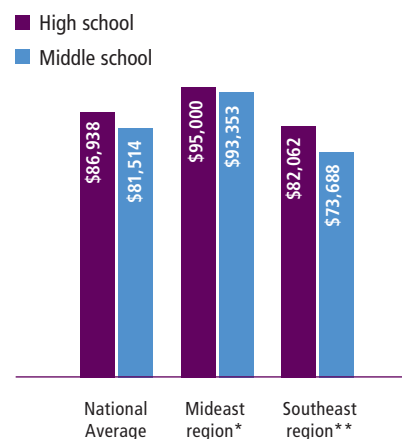
Delaware was among 31 states (including the District of Columbia) to adopt professional standards for school leaders. Development of these standards was led by the Council of Chief State School Officers' Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). Rather than academic course credits, these standards identify sets of skills and competencies grouped into five leadership standards — instructional, systemic, organizational, community and political, and interpersonal and ethical — to guide training and development efforts.⁴⁴

The School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA), developed in five states and Washington, DC, is now administered widely by Educational Testing Service (ETS).

ARE SALARIES COMPETITIVE?

Competing effectively for talented school leaders in our region is complicated by our size and location. It is an easy commute to large, urban districts to the north and west of us. In these districts, salaries often are higher, and the potential for advancement is likely greater. Delaware has the resources to pay competitive principal salaries. According to national data, principals in districts spending \$9,000 or more per student tend to receive higher salaries than those in lower-spending districts. Delaware spends on average \$9,072 per student. Still, four of Delaware's 19 districts report average principal salaries just below the national average.⁴⁵

Average Principal Salaries, 2004



* DE, DC, MD, NJ, NY, PA

** AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, WV

Source: Educational Research Service, 2005.

To have great schools, we need a predictable pipeline of talented leaders responsive to changing community needs. With two-thirds of our superintendents and principals eligible to retire in the next five to seven years, Delaware could set the standard for the nation if we get it right.

N/A

IN DELAWARE: *Who are our district and school leaders?*

Based on Delaware Department of Education data, our schools are served by a total of 290 district administrators, who work with the 170 principals and 183 assistant principals statewide. There are 19 superintendents and 22 assistant superintendents, and the rest of the administrative leadership comprises supervisors, specialists and directors in central office positions.

Of the superintendents and assistant superintendents, 32 are male, and the majority (86 percent) are white, older (the average age is 52) and well educated (more than half have a doctorate). They have been in education an average of 26 years, and more than two-thirds will be eligible for retirement in the next five to seven years.

Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents



Of the 180 principals leading Delaware's public schools, 52 percent are female. As a whole, they also are well educated, with one-third of principals and assistant principals having earned a master's degree and up to 45 hours of additional coursework. Although the average age is close to 50, the distribution is wider, especially among assistant principals, of whom one-third are between the ages of 30 and 40. Thirty percent of our principals have more than 29 years of experience, while 47 percent of our assistant principals have less than 15 years of experience.

Principals are less diverse than the students in our schools. Although almost 20 percent of the school building leaders are African American, there are no Hispanic, Asian American or Native American principals in our schools.⁴⁶

How well developed is our pipeline?

Most of tomorrow's school leaders are teachers today because the most common pathway into administrative careers is through teaching. This highlights a need for **quality preparation** in both teaching and administration that develops the comprehensive knowledge of instruction balanced with the business of running schools. According to a recent national analysis, administrator preparation in graduate schools of education is generally not effective.⁴⁷ The pipeline needs work; however, there are some changes under way.

Delaware has created a **two-tiered professional licensure system** that requires principals who hold a three-year initial license to complete an induction program. The program, which requires performance assessments and annual performance evaluations to demonstrate on-the-job proficiency, is aligned with national and state standards and includes requirements for raising student achievement. Delaware also has created alternative pathways to initial licensure for principals. In addition, the University of Delaware's **Delaware Academy of School Leadership** provides professional development activities for administrators.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Delaware has received a three-year **State Challenge Grant** from the Wallace Foundation to build a statewide professional development infrastructure that will prepare school leaders to improve the capacity of teachers to teach and students to learn.

We are one of 20 states participating in the **State Action for Education Leadership Project** to develop, recruit and retain high-quality leaders for public schools. The work to date has focused on succession. The project is now working with the three state universities that offer coursework toward school administrator certification to revamp their curricula, raising the level of rigor.

We also are one of eight states participating in the Southern Regional Education Board's **Challenge to Lead** project.

DELAWARE VOICES

"There's been significant turnover in board members and school leadership in the last five years so people don't have a good focus on the big picture. No one has given them the tools to rally and support reform or to change the family role and responsibility."

— Higher Education Leader

"When people feel welcome and students feel welcome, it changes the dynamic of the school."

— Parent

"The leadership of our schools should consist of the principals, teachers, parents and community."

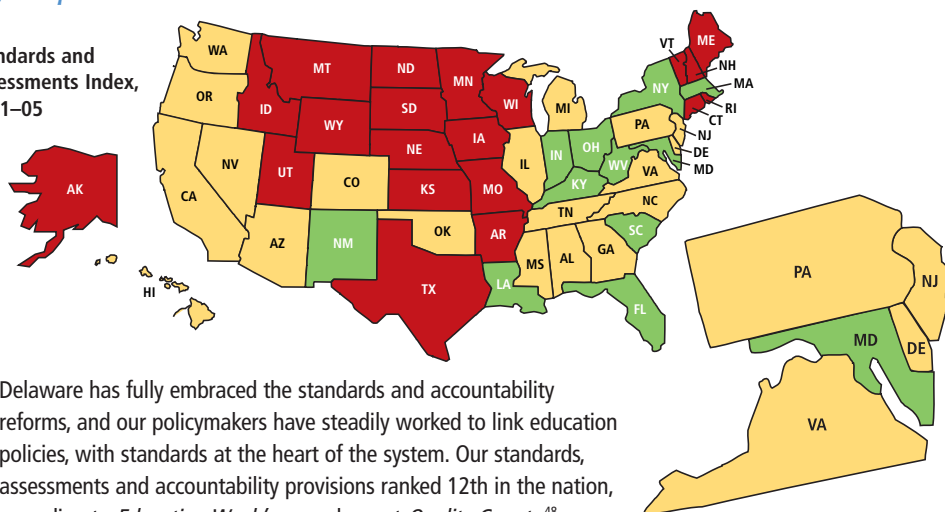
— Parent

STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Clear, high standards let everyone in the state, from students and teachers to parents, policymakers and the public, know exactly what students are expected to master to be prepared for learning and work in the 21st century. Rigorous assessments measure whether students meet the higher standards, providing the data educators need to make adjustments when students fall short. And information about school performance makes it possible to hold people and organizations at all levels accountable for results. Delaware has led the nation in establishing high standards for its students. The challenge now is taking these systems to a higher level that will have a greater impact on teaching and learning throughout the state.

NATIONALLY: *Early leadership, but others have jumped ahead*

Standards and Assessments Index, 2001–05



Delaware has fully embraced the standards and accountability reforms, and our policymakers have steadily worked to link education policies, with standards at the heart of the system. Our standards, assessments and accountability provisions ranked 12th in the nation, according to *Education Week's* annual report *Quality Counts*,⁴⁸ and we have received widespread credit for steadily working to improve results.

LEADER STATES

(Education Week Index, 2005)

1. New York	100
2. Louisiana	98
3. MA, OH, WV	95
<hr/>	
12. Delaware	90

In recent years, other states surpassed us by sharpening their standards and better aligning testing and accountability systems. We were in 13th place in 2001, moved up to 9th in 2002 and reached 6th place nationally in 2003 before dropping to 12th.

Maryland's system (tied with Indiana for 10th) was rated a little higher than ours, but we surpassed New Jersey (18th), Virginia (21st) and Pennsylvania (30th).

	Status 2005		Trends 2001–05
	<i>Ed Week</i> index score	Rank	Changes in <i>Ed Week</i> index score
Delaware	90	12th	+ 5 pts
Maryland	92	10th	- 6 pts
New Jersey	86	18th	+ 18 pts
Pennsylvania	81	30th	+ 18 pts
Virginia	85	21st	- 1 pt

Source: *Education Week. Quality Counts*, 2005.

DELAWARE'S STANDARDS AND TESTS: IN THE VANGUARD, BUT NEED REVIEW

To measure student performance accurately, state tests must be aligned to the standards. The **Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP)** was custom developed to align with state standards (only 14 states in the nation have done this). The DSTP tests in reading, writing and math are given to students in grades 3, 5, 8 and 10 each spring. A science and social studies test is administered to students in grades 4, 6 and 8 in May. The tests comprise multiple-choice, short-answer and extended-response questions. A small section of the test is nationally normed to allow for comparisons. Standardized reading and math tests were added in grades 2, 4, 6, 7 and 9 to meet the requirements of NCLB.

The promotion of elementary and middle school students hinges on their DSTP reading and writing performance. Delaware requires remediation for students who fail promotion or end-of-course exams. Starting with the class of 2008, high school students will have to meet state testing and course requirements to graduate.

The development of our academic standards and accountability system in the 1990s put us in the vanguard of states, but two recent reviews suggest we need to revisit key components. A report by Achieve, Inc., in February 2005 recommended that we revise the standards because they are not specific enough to drive instruction, end at about a 10th grade level and do not match up with higher education admission requirements.⁴⁹ A second report found that “not all students have adequate opportunities to learn the knowledge and skills required for them to be successful on the DSTP” and that secondary mathematics curricula among districts and charter schools were inconsistent, text-book dependent and not well aligned with the state standards.⁵⁰

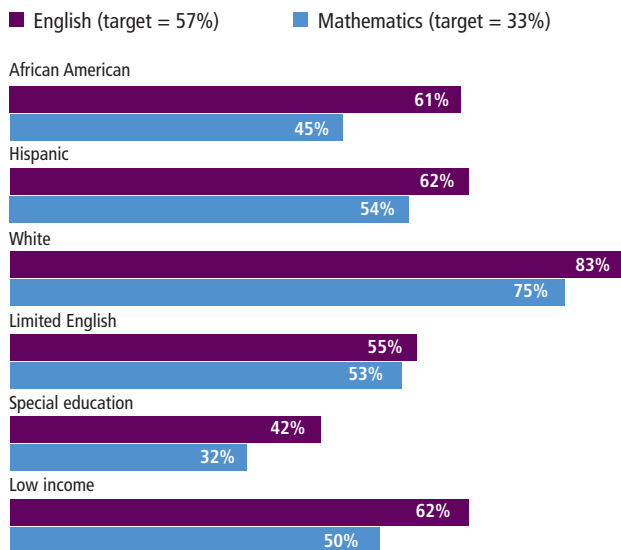
We have a legacy of national leadership in this area, but our standards could be made more specific and relevant to the last two years of high school, and testing data could be made more relevant to teachers.



IN DELAWARE: AYP goals met for all but special education students

Since enactment of the federal NCLB law in 2002, schools and districts are judged on whether they are making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). To make AYP, all student groups (different ethnic and racial groups, low-income students, students with disabilities, and English language learners [ELL]) must meet a state testing target in reading and math, as well as state goals for graduation.⁵¹ As the graph below shows, 2003–04 English language arts AYP goals were not met for special education or ELL students, and math AYP goals were not met for special education students.⁵²

How Delaware student groups fared against state AYP targets



Source: Delaware Department of Education, January 2005.

Under NCLB, persistent failure to meet the state's AYP goals has specific consequences for schools. We have an increasing number of schools facing advanced sanctions for failing to meet AYP. Just 12 schools were deemed in need of "school improvement" in 2003, but that number rose to 43 in 2004.⁵³

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Excellent **data systems** are critical because they drive all great organizations willing to reflect and adapt. Such systems allow education systems to show the public that students are making progress and that government dollars are being well spent. A few examples illustrate work under way to bolster our data systems.

Several Delaware districts are shifting local assessment practices to enable use of "**growth**" measures, which give them the ability to track individual student performance over time. The state could accelerate this process by modifying the assessment system to make it easier to follow individual students' progress.

Delaware was one of six initial states that participated in the **School Information Partnership (SIP)** (www.schoolresults.org), a three-year national collaboration to create an online database with state, district and school performance information. All available and relevant NCLB data for the 50 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia are displayed on the Web site. A full set of data analysis tools will be available when the initiative is completed.

In Delaware, as in many other states, scores on the state proficiency test tend to be much higher than scores on the NAEP test, where the **definitions for "proficiency"** are set higher. In middle school reading, for example, 71 percent of students are proficient on the DSTP, but only 31 percent meet the performance level of NAEP. One issue going forward is whether Delaware wants to set its performance levels at or closer to the NAEP levels, as states such as South Carolina and Maine have done.

DELAWARE VOICES

"There are unintended consequences of NCLB in that it forces comparing different kids instead of comparing students' performance over time. But that's what parents want to know: Is my child making a year's worth of progress in a year?"

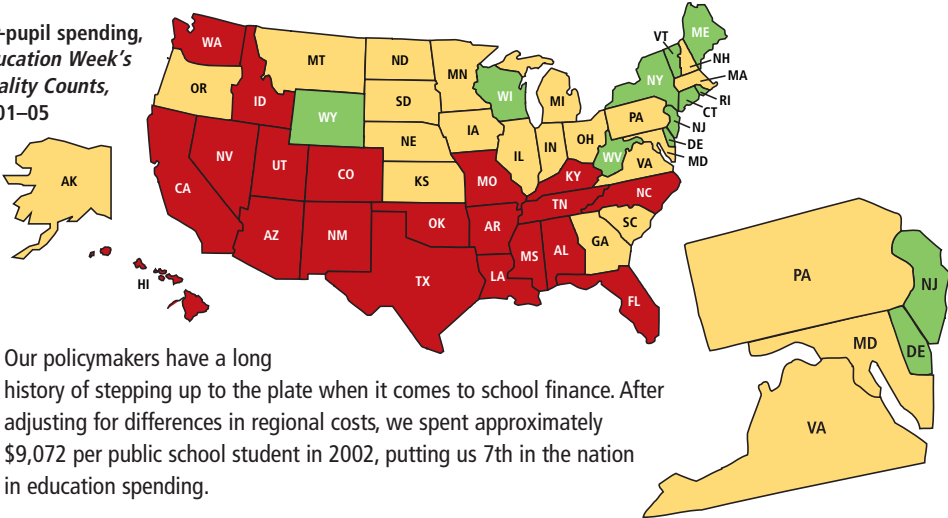
— Community Organization Leader

SCHOOL FINANCE

We spend about \$1 billion per year on public education in Delaware. Well invested, that kind of money can drive student performance to new heights. It can enable those serving students who need more support to hire the most qualified and gifted educators in the nation and to create great learning climates tailored to students’ needs. But it is equally clear that money alone cannot buy great education. School leaders and educators also need the capacity and flexibility to spend money well. Public school funding is a key measure of the level of political and public support for public education; to ensure continued support, our finance system must be transparent so investments can be linked to student outcomes.

NATIONALLY: 7th in per-pupil spending

Per-pupil spending, Education Week’s Quality Counts, 2001–05



Our policymakers have a long history of stepping up to the plate when it comes to school finance. After adjusting for differences in regional costs, we spent approximately \$9,072 per public school student in 2002, putting us 7th in the nation in education spending.

Among our neighbors, New Jersey ranks 2nd in the nation, just behind the District of Columbia. Delaware has consistently ranked in the top 10 states on this measure. Moreover, among states with more than one district, Delaware is the most equitable in distributing money among school systems.⁵⁴

LEADER STATES (2002 adjusted spending per student)	
1. District of Columbia	\$11,269
2. New Jersey	\$10,235
3. New York	\$10,002
7. Delaware	\$9,072

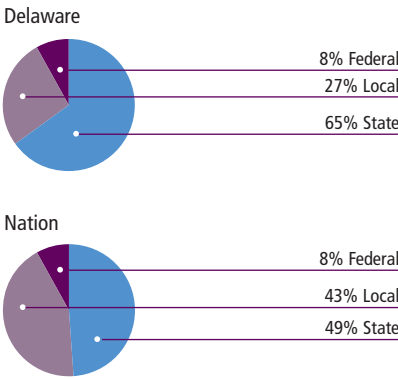
Although our spending remains high, other states are closing the gap. Between 1992 and 2002, we averaged 2.6 percent annual increases (after controlling for inflation), which placed us 14th among the states in per-pupil spending increases for the decade.

	Status (2005 report)		Trends reported (2001–05)
	Per-pupil dollars	Rank	Increase since 2001
Delaware	\$9,072	7th	\$1,564
Nation	\$7,734	N/A	\$1,029
Maryland	\$8,517	15th	\$1,722
New Jersey	\$10,235	2nd	\$1,568
Pennsylvania	\$8,328	16th	\$915
Virginia	\$7,735	27th	\$667

Source: Education Week, Quality Counts, 2005.

STATE PROVIDES TWO-THIRDS OF FUNDS

Compared to national patterns, a large share of our school funding comes from the state — primarily from out-of-state sources, such as from companies headquartered here but doing most of their business elsewhere. Delaware districts pass referenda to raise additional funds rather than having boards approve tax rates. Like a few other states, such as Michigan, the large share of state funding in Delaware removes much of the financing burden from local districts and communities.



Source: NCES.⁵⁵

In 2002–03, 65 percent of our school funds came from the state, about 27 percent from local taxpayers and 8 percent from the federal government. This contrasts with the national average, where 49 percent of school funding comes from the state, about 43 percent comes from local taxpayers and 8 percent comes from the federal government.

Although our education spending is 7th highest in the nation (\$9,072 per student), the system is complex, making it difficult to evaluate which investments are working better than others. And principals have insufficient flexibility to allocate funds to the greatest needs.



IN DELAWARE: *Equal funding is no longer enough*

The definition of a fair school finance system is changing in the United States, driven by state courts. Until recently, it was enough to show that all students had relatively equal resources spent on their behalf. Now, however, some states have been required to show that school spending is adequate for all students to reach standards — even if that means spending more on students who need more help. This issue has not been addressed in Delaware state courts, which is not surprising given our reputation for distributing money equally.⁵⁶

Despite that reputation, a finance gap between the highest and lowest districts remains. For instance, the Christina School District spent nearly \$9,300 per student in 2000–01 compared to \$7,740 spent per student in Delmar, a gap of more than \$1,500 or roughly a 27 percent difference between the highest- and lowest-spending regular districts.⁵⁷

Intradistrict disparities further skew spending patterns. Because we allow our senior teachers to choose where they teach, some schools end up with a much larger number of experienced (and expensive) educators. Another example cited in a recent study found student-teacher ratios in one district varied from a high of 17.7 students per teacher to a low of 10.9. And some schools are more able to raise private funds than others.⁵⁸

A 2004 study by the Delaware Public Policy Institute found that because our “unit count” system allocates the same resources to a school of a given size regardless of the relative need of its students, our highest-needs children may not be getting the support they need to excel. This is especially true if principals are unable to modify instructional resources or time to meet a broad range of student needs. The report also found little transparency in how public funds are being spent, and so it is difficult to tie expenditures to positive or negative outcomes.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

A few Delaware districts have begun providing **differentiated funding and staffing levels** to increase support for schools with concentrated populations of at-risk children.

In time, **property reassessment** will need to be addressed. Rural and beach areas have been rapidly developed in the past 20 years and are now quite valuable, but they have not been reassessed in that time. That means that although these districts are growing rapidly, they are not getting the appropriate local tax support.

DELAWARE VOICES

“The way we fund schools creates few incentives for creativity; even cafeteria workers are based on the unit count. This is why school districts don’t recruit until late in the summer when the best teachers are gone — they are so worried that they might overhire if not enough students show up.”

— Higher Education Leader

“There’s probably enough money, but where are the priorities? I would cut the financial pie a little differently. If we don’t catch the kids before they get to school they start too far behind, and if that happens we need to pull kids aside and give them extra help.”

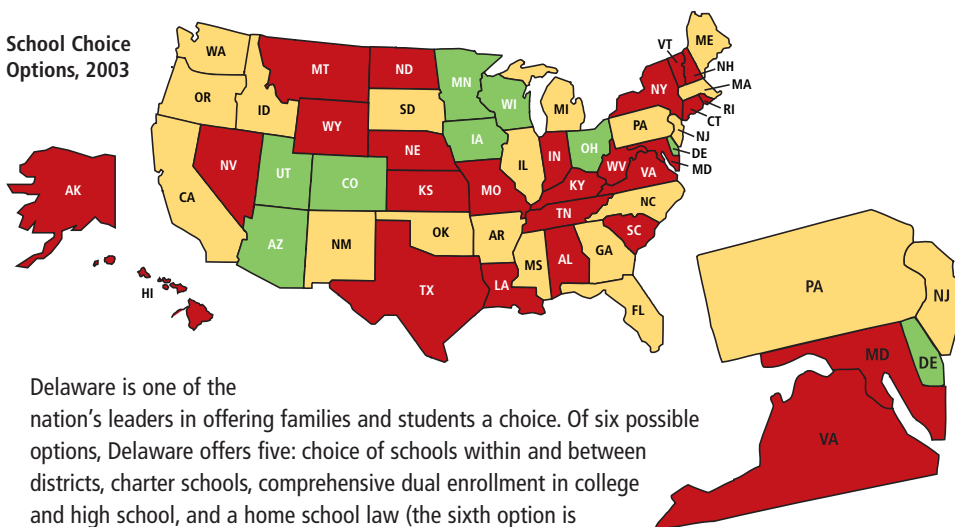
— Community Organization Leader

SCHOOL CHOICE

Within a system of standards and accountability for performance, school communities need the freedom to innovate in ways that meet the needs of individual students. Our schools can best meet those needs when students, parents and educators have an array of good and distinct choices and can make a commitment to one of many school options. Our system of schools should consist of inspired places to learn, which are effective in attracting and engaging students.

NATIONALLY: A leader in offering options

School Choice Options, 2003



Delaware is one of the nation's leaders in offering families and students a choice. Of six possible options, Delaware offers five: choice of schools within and between districts, charter schools, comprehensive dual enrollment in college and high school, and a home school law (the sixth option is scholarships or tax credits). Of our neighboring states, New Jersey and Pennsylvania offer three options, while Maryland and Virginia offer just charter schools and home schooling.

	Status (2003)					
	Intradistrict	Interdistrict	Charters	Comprehensive dual enrollment	Scholarship or tax credit	Home school
Delaware	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Maryland			✓			✓
New Jersey			✓	✓		✓
Pennsylvania			✓		✓	✓
Virginia			✓			✓

Source: Heritage Foundation, School Choice Programs in the States.⁵⁹

A WEALTH OF CHOICES

Compared to the national averages, Delaware families have many choices. The chart below covers 2001–02 data, the most recent for which nationally comparable data are available.

	% of students in various nontraditional schools, 2001–02	
	Delaware	Nation
Vocational/technical	4.8	0.04
Alternative	1.3	1.1
Charter	3.7	1.2
Magnet	0.9	1.2
Private	19.1	10.0

Source: NCES.⁶⁰

We had one of the highest charter school enrollment rates in 2001–02, when 3.7 percent of Delaware's public school students attended the state's 10 charter schools. Only Washington, DC, and Arizona had higher percentages of students in charter schools.

Recent student enrollment counts in fall 2004 show further growth: The number of charter schools has increased from 10 to 13, and the percentage of charter school students is now more than 6,500 students, or more than 5.5 percent of all public school students.

	Number of charter schools
Delaware	13
Nation	2,993
Maryland	0
New Jersey	52
Pennsylvania	103
Virginia	9

Source: Education Week, Quality Counts, 2005.⁶¹

Because of the tremendous growth of school choices, we are poised to lead the nation in this category. No state has yet figured out how to get beyond the “us vs. them” undercurrent that exists when students leave one school to attend another. Our strong charter school system and commitment to open enrollment and other forms of choice could make it possible for us to be the first to do so.



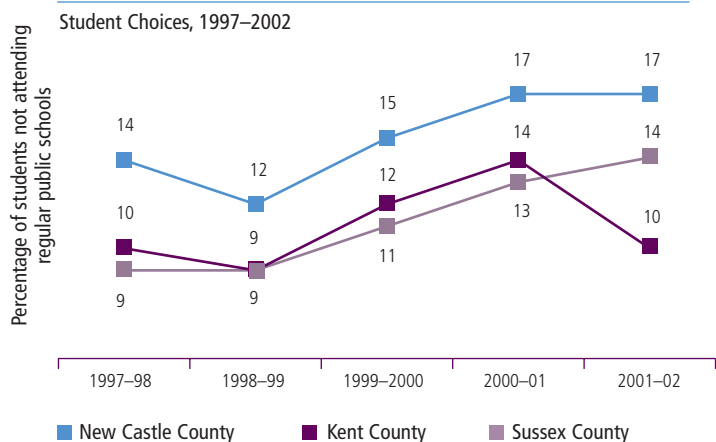
IN DELAWARE: *Charter school quality is high*

Our charters are generally of high quality as well. Of the 11 charter schools in existence in 2003–04, eight were rated “superior,” two were “commendable” and one was on “academic watch.”⁶²

An early 2005 report on our charter school system found a number of strengths and no serious weaknesses. The report acknowledged that some elements could improve; for instance, Delaware charters are more likely to be homogenous (mostly minority or white) than nearby regular public schools, which tend to have a more diverse mix of students.⁶³ The study lauded the state’s approach to and oversight of charter schools.⁶⁴

Parents’ choices extend to any public school

Delaware students have other public school choices as well. The percentage of students choosing a public school other than their regular assigned one has risen since the 1997–98 school year in two of our three counties. In all, 17 percent of students in New Castle, nearly 10 percent in Kent and 14 percent in Sussex exercised this choice in 2001–02.⁶⁵



Source: Audrey J. Noble, University of Delaware, conference presentation, 2003.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

New types of school choice can be seen in several districts working to redesign schools to be more responsive to their community interests. At the high school level, smaller learning academies are being fashioned from existing large comprehensive high schools, and curriculum and program options such as International Baccalaureate or a **focus on mathematics and science** are becoming more prominent.

Several schools are associated with **High Schools That Work**, an acclaimed national **comprehensive school reform (CSR)** model sponsored by the Southern Regional Education Board to provide support for curriculum, redesign and networking with other schools. Other national school support networks are present as part of the federally funded CSR program, and we could learn much from external assistance organizations and their experiences in Delaware.

The Innovative Schools Development Corporation is a nonprofit school-start-up and facility-financing organization that is working with eight charter schools throughout the state. It also is contracting with the Delaware Department of Education and exploring district collaborations.

The Delaware Charter Schools Network, a statewide association, helps support charter school founders.

DELAWARE VOICES

“The state needs a supply of good, diverse schools. This could be such a good opportunity because the state understands new businesses and small businesses and the need to have new products.”

— Community Organization Leader

“One size does not fit all; different kids have different needs and schools should reflect those differences.”

— Parent

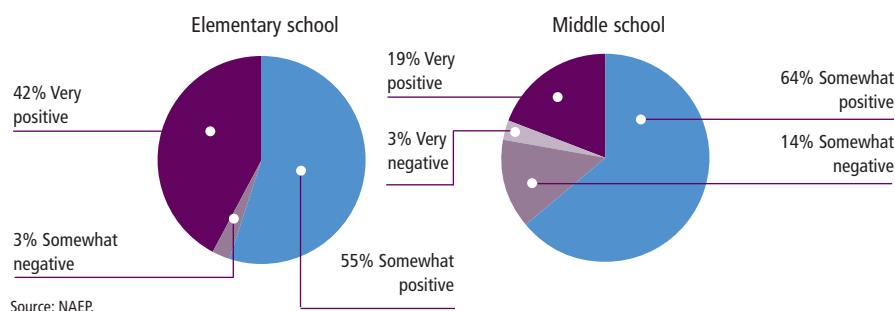
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Recent research confirms what common sense suggests: When families are involved, children do better in school. Students with families involved in school, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs; be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits; attend school regularly; have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school; and graduate and go on to postsecondary education. Because parents typically come and go as their children age, strong community engagement — involving business and grassroots organizations — also is needed to create a foundation for school improvement that can weather the inevitable changes in policy and personnel.⁶⁶

NATIONALLY: *Parent support for student achievement comparatively low in middle school, high in elementary*

School officials who administer the NAEP assessments complete a survey, and the results allow for some limited cross-state comparisons. Responding to one survey question, 83 percent of Delaware NAEP middle school administrators report that they are “very or somewhat positive” about the level of parental support for student achievement. Just 19 percent of those surveyed feel “very positive” about this parental support. Of our neighbors, Virginia and New Jersey have higher positive responses.⁶⁷

School administrators rate parental support for student achievement, NAEP, 2003



The picture is brighter among Delaware’s elementary schools. Ninety-seven percent of school officials surveyed are “very or somewhat positive” about the level of parental support for student achievement. But only 42 percent have “very positive” feelings.

We tend to trail other states on other questions about family engagement, especially in middle school, where reports on participation levels are often 40–60 percentage points lower than for elementary school. This decline in parental involvement in secondary school is a national challenge but may be particularly stark here: 91 percent of school officials surveyed say that Delaware parents participate in elementary school parent-teacher conferences (90 percent nationally), but only 28 percent report that parents participate in middle school conferences (61 percent nationally). Eighty-three percent of Delaware elementary schools offer volunteer programs (85 percent nationally), but only 40 percent do so at middle school (51 percent nationally).⁶⁹

STANDARDS FOR INVOLVING THE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

The National PTA promotes six standards for parent involvement, based on the work of Johns Hopkins University’s Joyce Epstein.⁶⁸

1. Communication between home and school is regular, two-way and meaningful.
2. Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
3. Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
4. Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
5. Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
6. Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families and student learning.

Parents and families need to know what is expected of their children, what they should expect from the schools and how they can help. School personnel can help family members become comfortable in one or more of the following roles: as teachers, encouraging their children at home; as volunteers, in the schools; as advocates, for their children and for quality education; and as decision-makers, on school councils and advisory teams. All staff in schools are ambassadors in this regard and must be willing to listen and create true partnerships built on mutual respect.

Although comparable national data are limited, Delaware appears to share the same challenges facing other states: a decline in parent engagement after elementary school; lack of adequate data to measure the level and variety of participation; and the need to involve more business leaders, clergy and other community members in supporting students.

N/A

IN DELAWARE: *Few parents tap NCLB opportunity*

Key provisions of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law allow students in low-performing Title 1 schools to transfer to other schools or seek free tutoring services. But only 2.9 percent of eligible Delaware families take advantage of the tutoring, compared to 11.3 percent nationally.⁷⁰ State data on transfers are not available, but nationally, only 1 percent of eligible parents have chosen to switch schools. We have few schools in the federal improvement categories that trigger these options, and existing open enrollment policies may make the transfer provisions less an issue here than elsewhere. Low participation in tutoring can be explained in part by lack of information; fewer than half of Delaware parents say they know about NCLB (49 percent) or have seen state testing results.⁷¹

Better data needed

Moving forward in Delaware, a major challenge is to collect better data. The more traditional measurements — such as the percentage of parents attending parent-teacher conferences or PTA meetings — are limited.

We also should ask how many families:

- feel well informed about what their children are expected to learn at each grade level, how that learning will be measured, how parents can help and what their options are.
- receive training to help their children at home.
- feel welcome and respected on the most basic level (for example, their phone calls are returned).
- participate on school leadership teams.

We also can assess the growth and effects of:

- corporate and civic partnerships with schools.
- mentoring programs and student internships.
- partnerships with community agencies to provide “wraparound” health, recreation and human services to students and families inside schools. When schools become the hubs of their neighborhoods in these ways and educators and others members of the community have a chance to work side by side to serve children and families, both communities and schools are strengthened.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Educators and parents say that lack of **parent involvement** is an important contributor to low student achievement, ahead of funding and teaching quality. More traditional forms of parent involvement, notably evening PTA meetings, are much less practical for single parents (29 percent of Delaware families) or families in which neither parent has a full-time job (20 percent).⁷² Cultural differences and language barriers can be additional obstacles.

In 2004, the United Way published the **Delaware Community Needs Assessment**, which identified a lack of communication among parents, school personnel and students. “There appear to be barriers in communication among all of these groups when it comes to discussing issues around education and support for students, parents, and staff.”⁷³

Several programs and policies offer inspiration. In 2002, for example, more than 5,000 students (4 percent of the state’s K–12 public school students) were being mentored by adults and college and high school students, according to the **Delaware Mentoring Council**. More than half of our schools had a formal one-on-one mentoring program, and 29 percent of schools had formal tutoring programs.⁷⁴

A number of community-based organizations — including the **Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League** and **United Way of Delaware** — are individually and collectively forming partnerships to strengthen the connection between neighborhoods and schools, ultimately supporting students’ academic and developmental achievement.

Delaware is piloting a **Parent Leadership Institute** based on the nationally recognized Pritchard Committee model launched in Kentucky.

DELAWARE VOICES

“Parents want to know how to make a difference for their kids. We have to have a more deliberate outreach, door to door, classroom to classroom. We have to go beyond the choir ... for voices that are never taken seriously. Parents feel good if you come to their door.”
— Community Organization Leader

“The sense of community has broken down. The system is closed to dialogue now, but we can bring the community to the table. We want to be involved in reform from the start, not as an afterthought.”
— Faith-Based Leader

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS: WE CAN SET THE PACE

We envision a system of great schools. In great schools there is a genuine sense of excitement among the teachers and students, an air of confidence and inquiry, and a clear focus and purpose. In a system of great schools, everyone takes pride in the quality of the school system. In a great system, there is no time for complacency; there is a continuous and collective questioning of how we are doing and what we can do better.

OUR STRENGTHS

Although our goals are high, we have many assets in Delaware that make these aspirations realistic.

- Delaware is small. Our public schools enroll slightly more than 119,000 students, making the system manageable and easing challenges that larger states face in bringing reforms to scale.
- We have a relatively strong economy. We have a balanced state budget and more Ph.D.s per capita than any state in the nation, and our unemployment rates are consistently below national averages.
- We have shown ourselves to be willing to take bold action. Delaware led the nation in standards-based reform for a decade, and we are better prepared than most states to meet the demands of the federal No Child Left Behind Act.
- A broad cross-section of stakeholders, led by the business and political sectors, participated in the past decade of reform.
- Leadership from both parties is accessible and supportive of reform.
- State funding levels are consistently in the top 10 in the nation.

We also have a history of dramatic effort and a record of progress. Our state leaders took on the challenge of reform more than a decade ago in the midst of a growing national push for better results for all students. And we have seen improvements over time, moving up from the lower tier of states to above average on many national measures of academic performance. Progress is steady, and scores on NAEP and Delaware's own student assessments are up. State leaders have followed a course of adjusting to circumstance and opportunity, and we can be proud of our accomplishments in education. The rare quality of leaders' building on their predecessors' hard work is an undeniable strength — the idea of "staying the course" has sustained reforms through many difficult decisions over the past 10 years.

Despite this record, we still have significant work to do. Success means that virtually all of our children will perform among the best in the country academically, that all schools will be places where adults and students feel welcome and challenged to do their best, and that all students will be prepared for an active civic life.



But when we examine our system from preschool through high school, we must acknowledge that success on that scale is elusive in 2005. Even where we have made solid gains, as in 4th and 8th grade reading, overall student proficiency is still inadequate and our successes are not widespread enough to meet our own state goals or the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. Accelerating progress will require a careful examination of current policies and practices. The education reforms under way incorporate groundbreaking features as well as some ways of doing business that we need to revisit. **Transforming all 200 schools across the state overnight is not realistic or necessary. Dramatically accelerating the performance of just 60 schools could bring us to a “tipping point” of 30 percent and make it possible for the ripples of change to move quickly in a state of this size.**

We know that schools are not the only places in which more work is necessary to improve student outcomes. Poverty and crime affect education, and schools cannot accomplish everything on behalf of society. It is up to the broader community — not just the education system — to pitch in. This will help us have better schools and happier and healthier communities. The Rodel Foundation’s work targets education, but we know that unprecedented partnerships across sectors are needed for the state to succeed.

WHAT WE CAN GAIN

We can do better. Some say that our progress to date is sufficient, that performance is improving and generally keeping pace with other states. *But what can we gain if we make our state one of the finest?* The potential rewards include growth in good jobs for our young people as businesses seeking a highly qualified workforce deepen their recruitment efforts within Delaware. Eventually, the success of our schools will draw more businesses into the state because their employees will welcome the opportunity to relocate here.

The incoming generation of children is smaller in number and entering a more competitive workforce. As the baby boomers retire, the next generation of employees filling those and new positions need to be top-notch. Couple the workforce imperatives with increasing international competition from Asia and Europe, and the need for action becomes clear. As international comparisons show and analysts confirm, our graduates are now competing with graduates in Beijing and Bangalore and not just in Boston.

This work also is about equity. All students, regardless of their families’ incomes, have a right to an excellent education. There is no greater return on investment than improving the likelihood that a child will be educated well enough to fully engage in and contribute to the growth and health of his or her community. This work contributes to a higher quality of life for everyone.

Finally, let us not forget Will Rogers’ argument for striving: “Even if you are on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.” All U.S. states, as well as many nations around the globe, are in the midst of education improvement efforts. Just to stay even with the rest of the nation is not enough: We must continue to push toward success. We have done good work, but there is more to do. We have a choice: to move forward slowly or to accelerate progress and reach our vision. Instead of keeping pace with the nation, let us set the pace.

APPENDIX: GUIDE TO THE NATIONAL MEASURES

An explanation of the national measures that we are using in our assessment follows.

CATEGORY: HIGH SCHOOL

PRIMARY NATIONAL INDICATOR: Urban Institute's Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) — high school graduation rates.

EXPLANATION OF INDICATOR: High school performance based on enrollment in grades 9–12 and graduation within four years.

CATEGORY: MIDDLE SCHOOL

PRIMARY NATIONAL INDICATOR: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) grade 8 — percentage performing at or above proficient in reading and mathematics. This is a “matrix sampling” test, meaning that no one student takes the entire test. Rather, many students are given parts of the test so that a judgment can be made about overall state performance. It is known as the “nation’s report card” in that it is the only assessment that can be used to make cross-state comparisons.

EXPLANATION OF INDICATOR: Middle school performance in reading and mathematics based on the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for 8th grade.

CATEGORY: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

PRIMARY NATIONAL INDICATOR: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) grade 4 — percentage performing at or above proficient in reading and mathematics.

EXPLANATION OF INDICATOR: Elementary school performance in reading and mathematics based on the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for 4th grade.

CATEGORY: EARLY LEARNING AND KINDERGARTEN

PRIMARY NATIONAL INDICATOR: National Institute for Early Education Research, *The State of Preschool: 2004 State Preschool Yearbook*.

EXPLANATION OF INDICATOR: This annual report summarizes state and federal programs for 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool and also ranks states on access and quality measures.

CATEGORY: TEACHER QUALITY

PRIMARY NATIONAL INDICATOR: *Education Week, Quality Counts* rank, 2005*.

EXPLANATION OF INDICATOR: Comparison of how states rank nationally on their efforts to ensure teaching quality, including policies to screen, train, mentor, assess and assign teachers; on their entry qualifications; and on their salary comparisons.

CATEGORY: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

PRIMARY NATIONAL INDICATOR: Not currently available.

EXPLANATION OF INDICATOR: Leadership is the second most important correlate to student performance behind teacher quality. Unfortunately, there does not yet appear to be a national indicator against which to compare Delaware's performance.

CATEGORY: STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

PRIMARY NATIONAL INDICATOR: *Education Week, Quality Counts* rank, 2005*.

EXPLANATION OF INDICATOR: Comparison of state systems of standards and accountability. This index values challenging academic standards, associated tests in each grade and subject, and a system that holds schools accountable for student performance.

CATEGORY: SCHOOL FINANCE

PRIMARY NATIONAL INDICATOR: *Education Week, Quality Counts* rank, 2005*.

EXPLANATION OF INDICATOR: Regionally adjusted per-pupil expenditures.

CATEGORY: SCHOOL CHOICE

PRIMARY NATIONAL INDICATOR: School Choice Programs in the States, Heritage Foundation.

EXPLANATION OF INDICATOR: Number of school choice program elements in place in 2003 out of six possible program options.

CATEGORY: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PRIMARY NATIONAL INDICATOR: Not currently available.

EXPLANATION OF INDICATOR: Although research is clear about the benefits of involving family and community in schools, there are no national indicators that adequately capture states' performance to provide meaningful comparisons.

* Note that *Education Week* indices have evolved so that state rankings may shift even if policies do not.

APPENDIX: ENDNOTES

- ¹ Citations for the data in the letter can be found in the next section and indicators.
- ² Delaware Department of Education (DEDOE) (Spring 2004). *Fingertip Facts on Education 2002–2003*. Dover, DE. Access online at: http://www.doe.state.de.us/docs/pdf/de_edfacts2003.pdf.
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- ¹⁷ DEDOE. DSTP 2004 summary. Access online at: <http://www.doe.state.de.us/AAB/State%20Summary%20Spring%202004.pdf>.
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