

## Overview: School Choice November 2015

### Introduction

Delaware's school choice program is the vehicle by which parents can enroll their children in any public school in Delaware, provided the school has capacity and parents follow the school choice application process. Families may choose to send their students to other schools in their home school district, schools in other school districts, magnet schools, vocational-technical (vo-tech) schools, or public charter schools via Delaware's school choice program. Nationwide school choice research indicates that in areas with school choice programs, there is some increased persistence to a high school degree, decreased dropout rates, and increased parent and student school satisfaction.<sup>i</sup>

### Current School Choice Landscape

The different types of school choice options in the state each have slightly different application requirements and selection processes.

### Definitions and Application Processes of Delaware School Choice Options

| Type of choice                                | Definition   | Application Process <sup>ii</sup>  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Within-district choice</b>                 | Students apply to attend a school or program within their same district, but different from their feeder pattern school.   | Parents and students complete the application form available online. The application is due by the second Wednesday in January of each year.         |
| <b>Cross-district choice</b>                  | Students may apply to attend a school or program in a public school district outside of their district of residence.   | Same as in-district choice process.  |
| <b>Magnet schools</b>                         | Students from any district may apply for admission to any magnet school in the state. Magnets are public schools that accept students based on demonstration of skills aligned with the school's area(s) of focus (academics, the arts, etc.). | Each magnet school's application process is different. Specific processes are outlined on the individual school's websites.                          |
| <b>Vocational-technical (vo-tech) schools</b> | Students may apply to schools in the county in which they reside. Vo-tech schools are public schools governed by independent district boards. Curriculum combines academic instruction, career training, and structured work experiences.      | Applications are available from the schools and online. Requirements for each vo-tech program vary slightly and are posted on each school's website. |
| <b>Public charter schools</b>                 | Charter schools are public schools governed by independent boards. They do not have "feeder patterns" like most district schools.  | Parents complete the online application form and submit it by the second Wednesday in January.   |



In 2013-14, approximately one in three Delaware public school students exercised school choice.<sup>iii</sup> That year thirteen percent of Delaware public school students participated in in-district choice, while six percent participated in cross-district choice. Eight percent of Delaware students attended charter schools, and another five percent attended vo-tech schools.

In March 2015, Governor Jack Markell announced the creation of a needs assessment and strategic planning process for all Delaware public schools, the Statewide Review of Educational Opportunities (SREO). The SREO, which is currently underway, will review current opportunities and trends in an effort to quantify areas of unmet need for Delaware families, and will be used to develop a statewide strategic plan to address the projected future educational needs of Delawareans.<sup>iv</sup>

Delaware is:

- One of 21 states that currently requires school districts to allow students to cross district boundaries to attend school.
- One of 23 states that currently requires school districts to allow students to transfer to another school in their same home district.

### How Delaware Compares

Over the past several years, many states have taken action to give more parents and families the ability to choose schools for their children. According to the Condition of Education report (2009), 24.5 percent of parents nationwide report having the ability to send children to a chosen public school. Between 1993 and 2007, the percentage of children attending a “chosen” public school rose from 11 percent to 16 percent nationwide.<sup>v</sup>

Delaware is one of 42 states, plus the District of Columbia, that has laws allowing for charter schools.<sup>vi</sup> Both the number and percentage of students enrolled in public charter schools in Delaware has grown in recent years. In the 2014-15 school year, Delaware had 24 public charter schools serving approximately 12,500 students.<sup>vii</sup> Nationwide, there were approximately 6,700 charter schools in operation in 2014-15, serving approximately 2.9 million students (approximately five percent of total public school student enrollment).<sup>viii</sup>

In 2015-16, there are a total of 27 charter schools in operation in Delaware, including five new charter schools: Great Oaks Charter School, Freire Charter School, The Delaware MET, Delaware Design-Lab High School, and First State Military Academy. One additional charter school, Delaware STEM Academy, has been authorized to open in the 2016-17 school year. Per legislation,<sup>ix</sup> no additional charter schools will be authorized to open in the City of Wilmington prior to June 30, 2018.

### Potential Action Steps

While there has been much work to ensure that all students have opportunities to attend high quality schools, there is work to build upon in this area. Recommendations for potential action steps related to school choice are included below.

| Category  | Potential Action Steps  | Progress Underway   | Supporters   |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Increase equity across the choice system</b> | Consider efforts to improve information on public school quality and services as well as continue to simplify equal access to all schools through a common application process. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enrollment Preferences Task Force</li> <li>• SchoolChoiceDE.org</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delaware Charter Schools Network</li> <li>• Delaware PTA</li> </ul> |

|  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
|  | Provide improved funding equity for public charter schools, particularly for costs associated with facilities.  | Charter School Performance Fund   | Delaware Charter Schools Network  |
| <b>Increase excellence across the system</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide parents and the public with better information about school performance via <b>school performance reports</b>.</li> <li>• Develop a common framework for school performance across all educational options.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delaware Charter School Performance Framework</li> <li>• GreatSchools.org</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delaware Department of Education (DDOE)</li> <li>• Delaware PTA</li> <li>• Delaware Charter Schools Network</li> <li>• Vision Coalition of Delaware</li> </ul> |
| <b>Be strategic about the growth of all new school options</b> | Utilize the <b>statewide strategic plan</b> , based on the SREO, to take action to address the stated needs with regard to supply and demand of educational opportunities in the state.   | Statewide Review of Educational Opportunities   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delaware Charter Schools Network</li> <li>• DDOE</li> <li>• State Board of Education</li> </ul>  |

## Additional Resources

- National Alliance for Public Charter Schools Dashboard: <http://dashboard.publiccharters.org/dashboard/home>
- Education Commission of the States, Choice of Schools Issue Research: <http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=22>
- Delaware Department of Education School Choice Program: <http://www.doe.k12.de.us/domain/81>

---

### Sources:

- <sup>i</sup> Education Commission of the States (ECS). (2013). Issue Brief. “[Open Enrollment is on the Menu—But Can You Order It?](#)”
- <sup>ii</sup> Delaware Department of Education. (2014). School Choice. <http://www.doe.k12.de.us/domain/81>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Delaware Department of Education. (2014). Across and Within District Choice Report.
- <sup>iv</sup> State of Delaware. (2015). Governor Initiates Statewide Plan for Future Education Offerings. <http://news.delaware.gov/2015/03/19/governor-initiates-statewide-plan-for-future-education-offerings/>.
- <sup>v</sup> Education Commission of the States (ECS). (2013). Issue Brief. “[Open Enrollment is on the Menu—But Can You Order It?](#)”
- <sup>vi</sup> National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS). (2015). Public Charter Schools Dashboard. <http://dashboard.publiccharters.org/dashboard/home>.
- <sup>vii</sup> Delaware Department of Education. (2015.) Online School and District Profiles. [profiles.doe.k12.de.us](http://profiles.doe.k12.de.us).
- <sup>viii</sup> National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS). (2015). [Estimated Number of Public Charter Schools & Students, 2014-2015](#)
- <sup>ix</sup> Delaware State Legislature. (2015). HB 56 with HA 1. <http://legis.delaware.gov/legislature.nsf/FSMain?OpenFrameset&Frame=right&src=/LIS/lis148.nsf/home>.