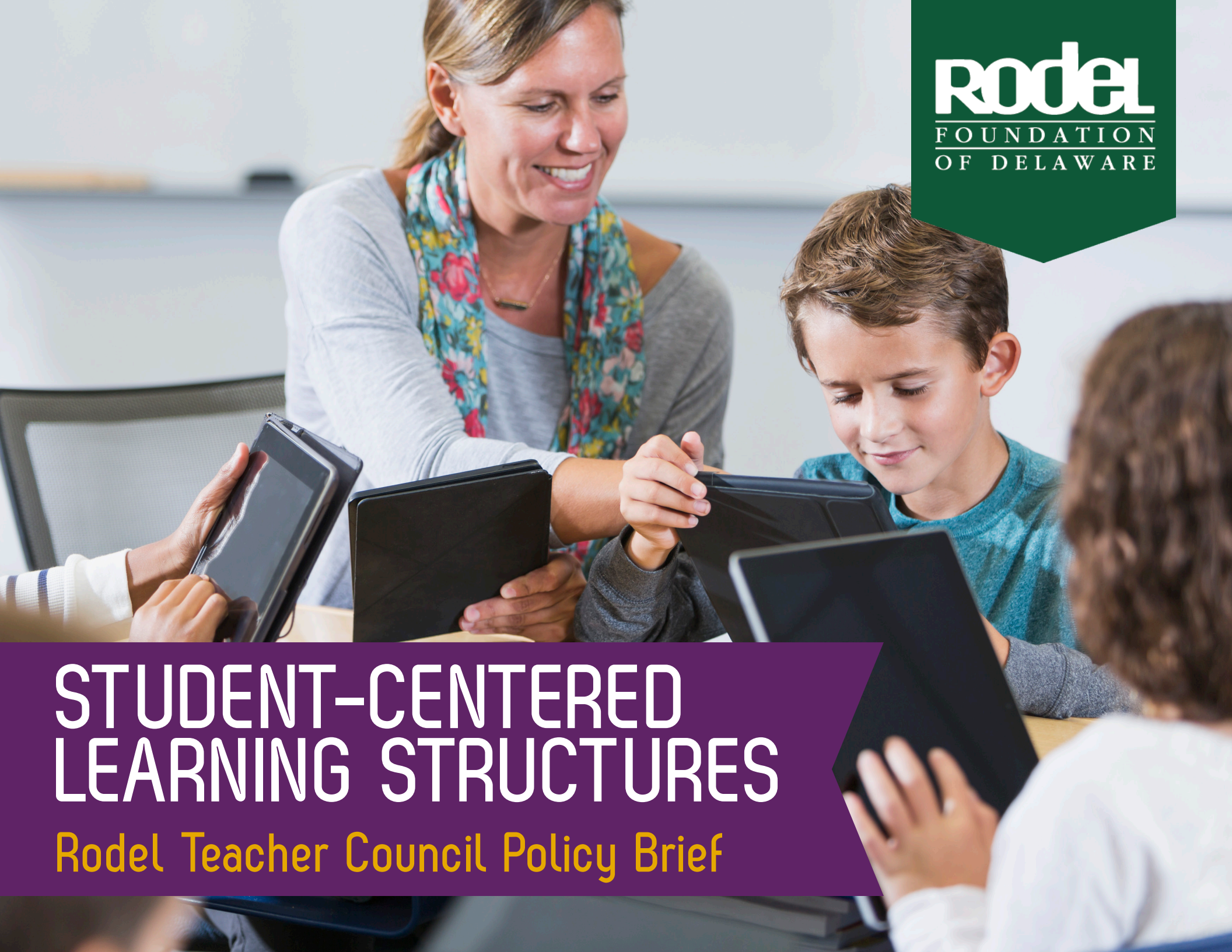

Rodel FOUNDATION OF DELAWARE

STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING STRUCTURES

Rodel Teacher Council Policy Brief

Introduction

When our working group really dug into the research behind student-centered learning structures, we noticed three major trends emerging. To really create a world-class, personalized education system in Delaware, we need to:

- *Shift our current expectations around technology in the classroom, so that teachers, specialists, administration, students, and parents are all aligned*
- *Create authentic experiences for students*
- *Develop active members of a global society, ones who are prepared to become lifelong learners in the 21st century*

In the pages that follow, you'll find our recommendations on how to reach those goals.

What is Personalized Learning?

Great teachers already know that students have different learning styles and learn at different paces—what works for one student does not necessarily work for the rest of the class. Personalized learning offers a new vision for education—one in which students become the center of the learning environment, and where students and teachers work together toward students' individual learning goals.

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From the Student's Perspective

Maya is a 14-year-old student in Delaware in 2020. For the past two years, Maya has been enrolled at the Delaware Community School (DCS), a public school.

At DCS, Maya and her family work with a team of adults to design learning experiences specifically for her based on the goals and interests she has identified as part of the planning process. They call this her personalized learning plan, and she checks it every week—and even every day—to plan her activities and find out her schedule.

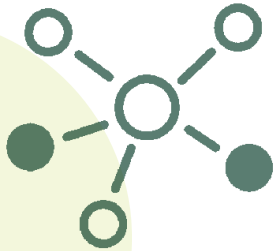
Maya is also enrolled in an online Chinese language course taught by an instructor in Beijing.

Her personalized learning plan "lives" online, but today, Maya's schedule includes four internship hours, where Maya gains mastery by assisting with Dr. Rodriguez's veterinary practice.

She is even taking a dance class at a local community center for a physical education credit at DCS.

All of this is facilitated by a variety of educators—some at DCS, and some based elsewhere—with Maya and her fellow students at the center of their own learning experiences.

This year, Maya will spend about 15 hours per month in Dr. Rodriguez's practice, and will earn some biology credits based on the work that she does and what she learns there. When she's not at Dr. Rodriguez's practice, Maya works with her classmates on in-depth projects related to her learning goals.



Maya's experience at DCS highlights how school will evolve for students, and the recommendations outlined in the coming pages show how existing structures will need to shift to support this evolution.

Maya's community experience advisor periodically meets with her and Dr. Rodriguez to check in on how things are going and help Maya make the most of her experience.

She spends some of her time on an individualized "playlist" of work to build skills and knowledge aligned with her personalized learning plan.

Making it Possible: Broadband

In order for Maya and students like her to direct their own learning, it's crucial that Maya's learning environments have consistent broadband access and capacity for all learners.

52% of schools in Delaware are ready for digital learning today. To meet 2018 demand, the typical school district in Delaware will need to grow bandwidth at least threefold.[2]

One current barrier to many Delaware LEAs upgrading their broadband capacity is cost. In a 2016 survey of Delaware's LEA infrastructure, 84 percent of respondents indicated they would consider participating in a statewide collaborative to share the costs of updating broadband capacity. *(Source: Education Technology Task Force Report)*

How does broadband enable student-centered learning?

Several aspects of Maya's learning experience require access to high-speed broadband, including:

Personalized learning plan | **Ongoing feedback and assessment** | **Online and distance learning**

As more digital elements are integrated into a learning environment, and as more users join the same network, the greater the need for additional broadband capacity.

Broadband: High-speed data transmission in which a single cable can carry a large amount of data at once.

Bandwidth: Capacity of internet access; greater bandwidth allows more information to travel more quickly over internet connections.

Local educational agency (LEA)[1]: A local school system pursuant to local board of education control and management. May be a school district or public charter school.

Recommendation:

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) should collaborate in order to form a broadband cooperative. A broadband cooperative allows multiple districts and charters to come together and purchase services from broadband providers at a steeply discounted rate. LEAs could own the physical equipment such as routers, and computers, but would come together to purchase the services. This would greatly reduce costs per LEA, potentially in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. This would also provide LEAs with more efficient coverage and quicker download/upload speeds. This could help achieve the goal of 1/Gbps per 1,000 students/staff by year 2017-18.

[1] http://www.ed.gov/race-top/district-competition/definitions

[2] 2015 State of the States: A report on the state of broadband connectivity in America's K-12 public schools. http://stateofthestates.educationsuperhighway.org/

Making it Possible: Student Centered Funding System

In order for Maya and her classmates to have opportunities for online/distance learning, community experiences, and other activities related to their specific needs and interests, Delaware's funding system will need to shift to be more student-centered.

In the current system...

Students who complete high school math and/or language requirements and wish to enroll in online and/or college-level courses to receive additional credits may not be able to due to a lack of state and LEA funds for these purposes.

Most resources aren't allocated at the student level, but rather based on "units" or commitments by the state to pay for specific personnel expenses.

While some resources (i.e., for special education students) are allocated at the student level, if students transfer into a school after the September 30 unit count, the resources allocated to them do not move with them.

In Maya's experience...

As students move through content at their own pace with support from their teachers, they can work with advisors to make decisions about how to allocate funds for dual enrollment, online courses, and other opportunities outside of the traditional school day/year.

State funding for Maya's education is flexible, allowing school leaders to work with Maya and her family to make decisions about her academic program without cumbersome requirements about how the school has to allocate resources.

A more responsive state funding system would update periodically throughout the school year, adjusting based upon student enrollment and students' defined needs.

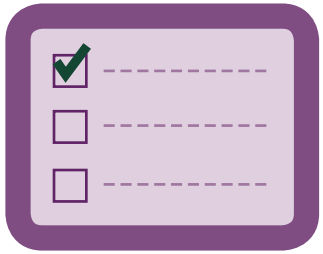
Recommendation:

Pilot a student-centered funding system aligned to the demands of truly personalized learning. Allocations should be responsive to individual students' needs, interests, and goals, not based on units. This could include resource allocation for students to access community programs and individualized educational opportunities based on their interests, needs, and goals.

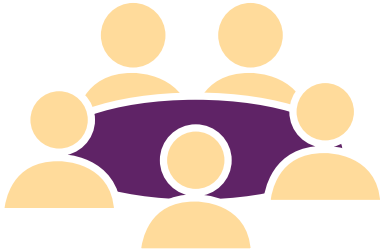
Making it Possible: Personalized Learning Plans

Personalized learning plans serve as guidebooks or maps for students, educators, and parents, showing what content the student has mastered, and where he or she is headed next. The example below is based on the personalized learning plan currently used at Summit Public Schools, though there are many ways to implement a personalized learning plan.

Maya logs into her personal playlist to begin her assignment on a given standard. She can choose what types of materials she can use for learning and practicing the concepts, and when she is ready for the assessment.



Maya knows what she needs to do to move on, and she directs her own learning at her own pace, with support and guidance from her teachers.



Maya relies on the support of her teachers—and her fellow classmates—as she completes projects in her PLP, which include individual work as well as group projects to apply what she is learning.

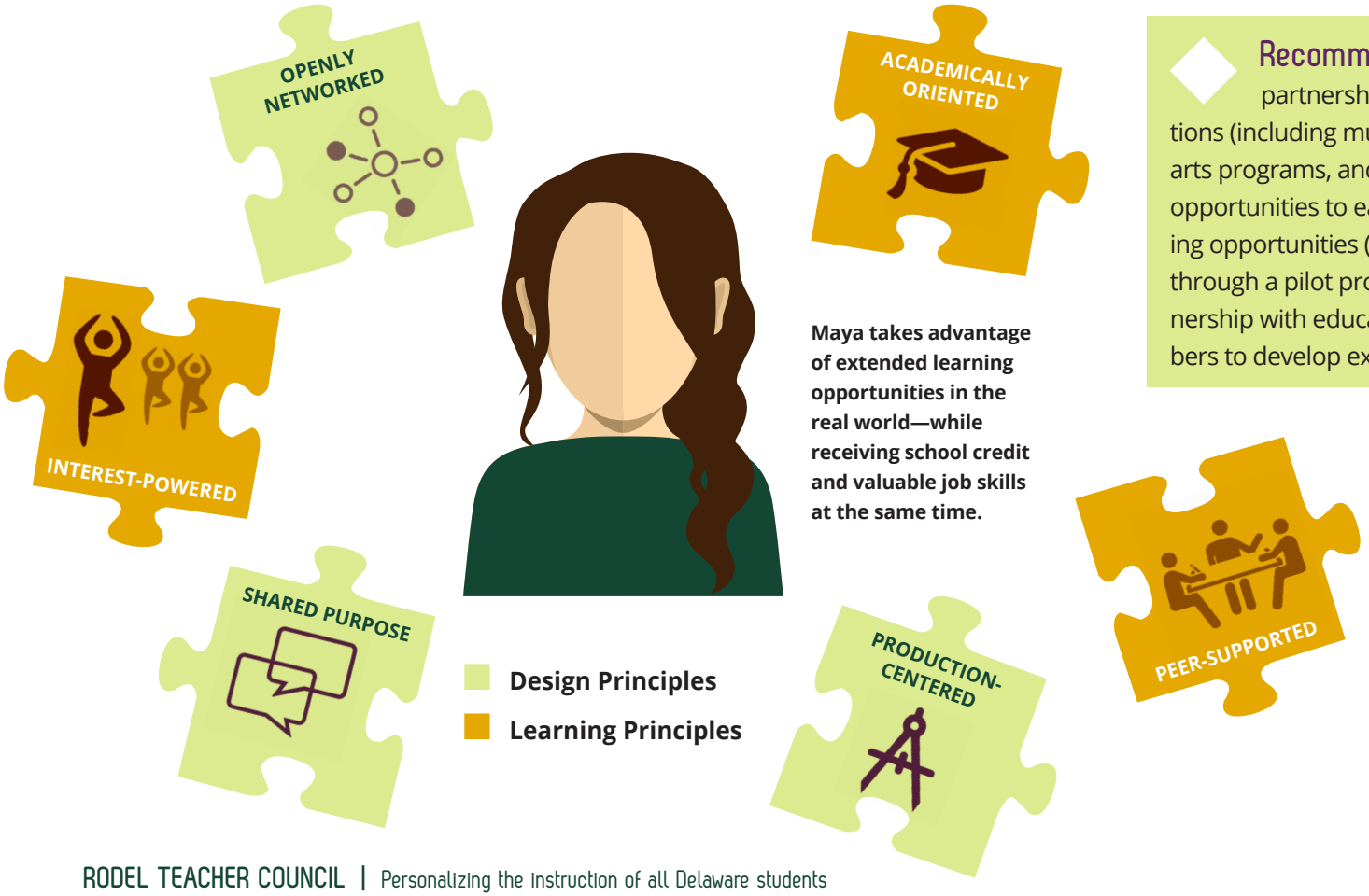
Recommendation: The state should provide flexibility to the Local Education Agency (LEA) to incentivize pilots of Personalized Learning Plans (PLP). A PLP is developed for students and by the students, in conjunction with educators and parents, as a way for them to achieve academic and lifelong success through short and long term goals. A PLP is similar to a portfolio utilizing technology to capture where a student begins and their achievement of mastery along a continuum.

Personalized Learning Plan: Similar to a portfolio, a personalized learning plan utilizes technology to capture where a student begins and their achievement of mastery along a continuum, and is used to chart a path for how students will achieve their goals. The plan is developed for students and by the students, in conjunction with educators and parents.

Source: EdSurge, "A Peek Inside Summit's Personalized Learning Software," https://www.edsurge.com/news/2014-06-01-a-peek-inside-summit-s-personalized-learning-software

Making it Possible: Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) and Community Partnership

Community involvement is crucial in helping to create real-world connections to student learning. Community members should be involved in shaping what personalized learning looks like for their students, as well as supporting the development of opportunities for students to participate in extended learning opportunities.



Maya takes advantage of extended learning opportunities in the real world—while receiving school credit and valuable job skills at the same time.

Recommendation: Build on existing community partnerships between LEAs and community organizations (including museums, libraries, businesses, nonprofits, arts programs, and other groups) to provide students with opportunities to earn credits via meaningful extended learning opportunities (ELOs). Consider launching this initiative through a pilot program supported by a public-private partnership with educators working alongside community members to develop expectations and outline competencies.

Extended Learning Opportunity: the primary acquisition of knowledge and skills through instruction or study outside of the traditional classroom methodology, including, but not limited, to: apprenticeships, community service, independent study, online courses, internships, performing groups, private instruction.

Source: http://education.nh.gov/innovations/elo/

Rodel Teacher Council member Robyn Howton's classroom at Mount Pleasant High School.

The RODEL TEACHER COUNCIL was convened by the Rodel Foundation of Delaware in 2013 to elevate the voices of teachers, represent the diversity of the teaching force in Delaware schools, provide a venue for teachers to weigh in on important issues affecting their work, and help set the course for education improvement in Delaware. The council is a group of teacher leaders dedicated to finding solutions, improving their craft, and leveraging their voices for the benefit of their students.

In October 2014, the Rodel Teacher Council published the *Blueprint for Personalized Learning in Delaware,* which identifies state and local policy improvements that would enable personalized learning. The document is one of the first examples of educators developing policy recommendations for personalized learning in the nation.

To read the Blueprint, and to learn more about the RTC, visit: www.rodelfoundationde.org/who-we-are/teachercouncil/

Rodel FOUNDATION OF DELAWARE

THE MISSION OF THE RODEL FOUNDATION OF DELAWARE IS TO HELP DELAWARE BUILD ONE OF THE FINEST SYSTEMS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE WORLD BY 2020.

- Promoting policy changes that can have a huge impact statewide, such as raising academic standards, using timely data to make decisions, and investing in our youngest learners.
- Provide seed funding to innovative, potentially high-impact initiatives. Whether our ideas come from Seaford or Singapore, our strategy is simple: Do more of what works.
- Creating and leading diverse statewide partnerships that catalyze action, such as the Rodel Teacher Council.

www.rodelfoundationde.org