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Vision 2015 a high priority for University of Delaware

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This month marks the third anniversary of Vision 2015, Delaware's ambitious plan to reform preK-12 education and make Delaware's public schools the best in the world.

To mark the milestone, the University of Delaware will host "Vision 2015 and Delaware's Race to the Top" on Tuesday, Oct. 27. The conference is a follow-up to last fall's symposium, "Making Vision 2015 Work," and the fifth in a series of conferences dedicated to creating knowledge-based partnerships statewide.

The conference will feature Gov. Jack Markell, Delaware Secretary of Education Lillian Lowery and Vision 2015 Chair Skip Schoenhals. Panels of national and local experts will discuss how Delaware can recruit and retain more highly effective teachers and meet the critical needs of chronically low-performing schools.

The university is particularly honored to have U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan deliver the conference's keynote address. Secretary Duncan will discuss the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top initiative and the \$4.35 billion in competitive grants being made available to support states' education reform efforts and innovation in classrooms. The reform principles on which Race to the Top is based align well with Vision 2015, and Delaware is determined to be a leader in this national effort to strengthen public education.

The University of Delaware is an important partner in Vision 2015. UD faculty and administrators were key contributors to the plan and its implementation strategies, and the University's Delaware Academy of School Leadership provides executive training to the leaders of schools that are part of the Vision 2015 Network -- a network that now includes 25 schools across the state and serves nearly 20,000 students. The Network's members are implementing several of the Vision 2015 recommendations: using student data to improve teaching, changing school culture through improved leadership and targeted instruction, and collaborating across districts and charter schools to share best practices. By all accounts, the network is working: 80 percent of the first network schools have shown marked improvement in their priority instructional areas.

The University of Delaware has a compelling interest in the continuous improvement of preK-12 education -- not only because UD students are drawn from the state's pool of high school graduates, but also because teacher education and school leadership are important disciplines for our faculty and students. One in 10 University undergraduates is enrolled in a teacher education program; another 600 students -- including many practicing teachers and school leaders -- are enrolled in graduate education programs; and 1,000 continuing education students take education courses in any given academic year.

Clearly, high-quality education is critical to our vitality -- as a state and as a nation -- and the key ingredient in our national prosperity. The U.S. must commit to dramatically increasing the number of high school students who complete college and regain its global leadership in college-educated youth. The initiatives to be discussed at "Vision 2015 and Delaware's Race to the Top" are essential to reaching this goal.