



October 23, 2009

## Three years in: Vision 2015 reports on progress

*DELAWARE VOICE*

By *MARVIN N. "SKIP" SCHOENHALS*

Three years ago, a coalition of Delaware's public, private and civic leaders launched Vision 2015 -- a bold plan to provide world-class schools for every student in our state. At that time, we promised to report publicly on our progress. Vision 2015 calls for excellence and accountability from our education system; we owe that in return.

Today, I can report that Delaware's education system and many of our schools have made real strides toward the goals of higher standards, higher performance and greater accountability that are hallmarks of a world-class system. I also must relay that we are far from finished.

Changing the culture of public education is a complex task, yet one that lies at the heart of our effort: our school leaders, educators and school staff need additional supports for their increasingly challenging work; our schools need funding that is flexible and fair for all their students; our students need the time and attention required to realize their full potential; and school leaders and decision-makers need the data, testing and reporting systems that will help them know when children are succeeding.

The complexity of this work means that Vision 2015 and our many partners have been working on numerous fronts. Some highlights:

- Teachers and administrators in the 25-school Vision Network are changing the way they use time, data and other resources to accelerate achievement for the 20,000 students they serve. In just two years, eight out of the 10 schools that joined the network in 2007 have demonstrated marked progress in their areas of instructional focus. For example, Indian River High School has increased students' writing proficiency, and Kuumba Academy students are excelling in math.
- The General Assembly has modernized our teacher certification process to allow Delaware schools to participate in such respected national programs as Teach For America and Teacher Residencies, further increasing the number of talented educators in our classrooms. This fall, 21 top college graduates from around the country are working alongside other classroom teachers to help close the achievement gap in Wilmington's highest-need schools through Teach For America, while they pursue master's degrees through Wilmington University.
- The Leadership for Educational Achievement in Delaware Committee identified up to \$158 million in our state education budget that could be spent more efficiently to benefit students in the classroom. To date, the state has realized at least \$3 million in LEAD-identified energy and transportation savings, with more planned through administrative efficiencies. LEAD also recommended changes in the way Delaware raises and distributes taxpayer dollars so that schools can better meet the actual learning needs of the students they enroll.
- Several initiatives dedicated to closing the preparation gap for Delaware's youngest learners also are making progress. The Delaware Stars for Early Success quality-rating program is helping more than 115 early education programs improve their services, which is benefiting more than 7,550 children. And a collaboration led by Lt. Gov. Matt Denn and PNC Delaware President Connie Bond Stuart is prioritizing goals for a top-notch state plan for early childhood education. Recommendations

are due in early 2010, along with an audit of available funding, now spread among numerous agencies and organizations.

- In an effort to set the highest expectations for those who work and learn in our schools, Delaware has joined the national Common Core Standards initiative to create internationally benchmarked standards in mathematics and English language arts. And soon our Department of Education will be replacing our year-end academic assessment system with a leading edge tool, pioneered by Delaware educators, that tracks student progress over time, making it possible for teachers to tailor instruction to each child's needs.
- To ensure the same level of citizen involvement in our current efforts that we had in the development of Vision 2015, a new independent nonprofit organization, Education Voters of Delaware, was launched early this year. The public's voice is critical to building support for world-class schools, and Education Voters welcomes your input.

We are pleased that Gov. Jack Markell and Secretary of Education Lillian Lowery are committed to further reforms that align with Vision 2015 recommendations, as well as with the national priorities set by President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. These reforms will lead to improvements in how we recognize and support teachers and will offer every student the opportunity to attend a dynamic, exceptional school. We expect that the Markell administration's forthcoming strategic plan will place Delaware in a strong position to compete for a share of the \$4.35 billion federal Race to the Top funds, which will be awarded to only a small number of states that demonstrate real innovation and leadership in education reform. We intend to make this case personally when Secretary Duncan keynotes this year's Vision 2015 conference at the University of Delaware on Tuesday.

As we celebrate this progress, however, we must be mindful that much more is needed. In the coming year, we will work with state government to provide superintendents and principals with increased financial flexibility so they can address the specific needs of the students they enroll. We intend to support interventions that can turn around chronically low-performing schools. And we will continue to advocate for cost efficiencies that benefit our classrooms, making sure that every dollar spent on public education in Delaware is invested wisely, moving us closer to our goal of raising student achievement.

I urge all Delawareans to read "Vision 2015 -- Three Years of Progress: 2006-2009" at [www.vision2015delaware.org](http://www.vision2015delaware.org). And I encourage everyone who cares about the quality of public education in Delaware to join Education Voters' campaign to make Delaware the First State in Education ([www.educationvotersdelaware.org](http://www.educationvotersdelaware.org)). The children of Delaware will thank you.

---