

PRINT FORMAT
SPONSORED BY

Schools report: More money needed for high achievement

By ALISON KEPNER, The News Journal

Updated Tuesday, November 27, 2007 at 1:04 pm

Delaware educators would have to increase per-pupil spending by as much as 83 percent to create high-achieving schools under the state's current system, a new Delaware Public Policy Institute analysis finds.

The nonprofit group's report, released at noon today, looks at the additional per-student investment that would be needed for 95 percent of public school students to score at the highest two levels on Delaware Student Testing Program reading and math exams in 2009.

"How Good is Good Enough? Student Achievement, Spending and Delaware's Future" aims to spur conversation about how high Delaware should set its standards — and how much the state is willing to spend to reach them.

The institute's estimate is based on the assumption that the basic system remains unchanged, so it is not a projection of the Vision 2015 reform plan's cost. Vision 2015 — created last year by a coalition of education, business and community leaders — aims to revamp the state's school system into a world leader by 2015 through changes such as more time in school each year, a statewide curriculum, more power and accountability for school principals, a uniform statewide pay scale for teachers, a simpler and more equitable funding system and greater state investment in preschool education. Its estimated cost is more than \$100 million over several years.

"It's not going to cost 83 percent more to do everything in Vision 2015," said Marvin "Skip" Schoenhals, chairman of Vision 2015 and DPPI.

For Vision 2015 supporters, the report's bottom line is clear: Delaware can't afford world-class schools under the current system.

"If we keep the current system the same, we likely will get the same results we have today, which works for some kids but not a lot of kids," said Paul Herdman, president of the Rodel Foundation of Delaware, a financial backer of both the Public Policy Institute's study and Vision 2015.

While the institute's study was conducted independently and in advance of Vision 2015, some of the same players are involved in both efforts. In addition to Herdman and Schoenhals sitting on both groups, the institute's executive director, John Taylor, also is a Vision 2015 steering committee member. University of Delaware's Dan Rich and Delaware State Chamber of Commerce's James Wolfe also are on both.

With \$235,000 funding from the Longwood Foundation, Rodel and other sponsors, the institute hired Colorado-based Augenblick, Palaich and Associates to look at Delaware's current per-pupil costs in small, medium and large districts, then project how those costs would change to reach "modest" and "high" levels of student achievement. They defined "modest" as bringing 9 percent to 21 percent of the state's students to Level 4 or 5 on the DSTP by 2009. At "modest" level, 62 percent of low-income, special education and English language learner students would reach Level 3 in reading and 41 percent would reach Level 3 in math.

"High" was defined as having 95 percent of all students at Level 4 or 5. Between 26 percent and 27 percent of students reached those levels on the 2007 exams.

Fundamental to the institute's report models is weighted student funding, meaning schools receive more money to educate students with more needs. The dollars would follow the child to whatever school he or she attends. While

special education students currently receive more state dollars, English language learners and low-income or at-risk students do not.

According to Augenblick, Palaich and Associates' analysis, small districts -- those with about 3,300 students -- spent \$8,123 per child in 2003 but would need to spend \$9,520 or \$14,854 to reach modest and high levels, respectively. Those per-student estimates are averages that take into account the extra money needed for special education, low-income and English language learner students.

In medium districts with about 6,500 students, the 2003 cost was \$9,266 per child with projected needed investments of \$9,370 and \$14,649, respectively. In large districts -- those with about 10,400 students -- APA estimated needs of \$9,475 per child (for modest) or \$14,824 (for high), increases from the 2003 spending of \$8,585 per child.

Not included is funding for low-income student preschool, gifted classes or vocational programs. For the preschool programs, the cost estimates for a half-day program for low-income 3-year-olds range from \$2,500 per student in a large district to \$5,000 per student in a small district. A full-day program for all 4-year-olds is projected to cost \$4,500 to \$5,000 per student.

The report estimates the per-student cost of a stand-alone, elementary-level gifted program to cost \$3,000 to \$4,000 per participating student. Meanwhile, APA analysts found vocational programs in Delaware cost about 15 percent more than traditional high school programs.

Charter school costs also weren't included. The APA analysis indicated charters cost 10 percent to 25 percent more to operate than comparable public schools because their operational budgets must pay for facilities and administrative costs, tabs traditionally picked up by district offices. Removing facility costs, charters cost 5 to 7 percent more to run, the study found.

In addition to weighted student funding, Vision 2015 calls for looking for efficiencies in how the state's \$1.6 billion education dollars are spent now. That work already is under way by the governor-appointed Leadership for Education Achievement in Delaware Committee. Gov. Ruth Ann Minner charged the group to look for ways to reallocate money to better serve students and to examine the feasibility of weighted student funding. The committee's study, conducted by Boston Consulting Group and funded by the Delaware Business Roundtable, is due to the governor next month. A second study by the committee, due in March, will look at better ways to generate and distribute state education dollars.

Copyright © 2007, The News Journal. Users of this site agree to the [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy/Your California Privacy Rights](#) (Terms updated March 2007). [Questions?](#)