

It's an Exciting Time in Education -- October 2007

By Michael N. Castle

This year, as Congress continues working on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), more widely recognized as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and as Delaware celebrates its first year of the state's education initiative Vision 2015, we should take a moment to reflect upon the fact that that we are encountering one of the most exciting times in education.

I have argued this point for several years because we are all engaged, as a country, on closing the achievement gap. This conversation is happening at all levels of government, amongst parents, academics, and especially in our school systems. This dialogue and support is imperative and provides necessary momentum.

On the state level, Delaware took the initiative to commit to ensuring a high-quality education for every child in the state by 2015 with Delaware's Vision 2015. By setting their sights high, investing in high-quality early childhood education, developing and supporting great teachers, empowering principals to be strong leaders, encouraging instructional innovation and more learning options, and establishing a simple and fair funding system, the Vision 2015 Team, along with Delaware's education partners, business partners, and educators and parents have moved the state closer to reaching this goal.

In only its first year, Vision 2015 has seen its priorities reflected into law, had its first group of districts and schools join the Vision Network, and the Vision Network's school administrators and teachers have begun their executive leadership training program.

Looking beyond to the national level, the National Assessment Governing Board recently released two reports on math and reading achievement of 4th and 8th grade students as assessed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as "the Nation's Report Card."

While 13 other schools are statistically equal to Delaware's performance on NAEP, Delaware Public Schools led in average score gains since the Delaware Student Testing Program was implemented in 1998. As the Delaware Department of Education noted, this year Delaware ranks first for all students in 4th grade math gains, first for all students in fourth grade reading gains, fifth for all students in 8th grade math gains, and first for all students in 8th grade reading gains.

Delaware's achievement gap between African American students and white students narrowed in 4th and 8th grade reading as well as 4th grade math. Additionally, 4th and 8th grade math scores for females, African Americans, Hispanic, and low-income students increased significantly. Overall, Delaware's NAEP results are higher than the national public school average.

These results demonstrate the hard work Delaware's students, parents, teachers, and schools have done and continue to do on a daily basis.

Delaware is a proven leader in education. Our state has made great strides in raising student achievement, and we should use these success stories as a base to continue raising the bar for academic achievement in Delaware and around the country.