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Make or break moment for General Assembly

The Delaware General Assembly was handed a challenge late last month.

The Leadership for Education Achievement in Delaware Committee presented its report on ways to best use Delaware's education funds.

By taking a close look at budget items, the committee came up with ways to save \$86 million to \$158 million annually from the state's \$1.6 billion education budget.

The study is part of the Vision 2015 initiative that aims to build a world-class public education within the next seven years.

Vision 2015, a joint effort of the public, private and government sectors, has already identified a number of areas where the savings could be used to meet their ambitious goal.

We suspect that the estimates of savings are on the conservative side.

As the committee acknowledged, it will take a fair amount of political courage to tap into these savings.

The toughest issue involves consolidating purchasing, information technology, maintenance and numerous other functions that could be centralized. The thorniest issue involves the consolidation of school districts. This difficult process should begin north of the canal, since the current configuration is a creature of a desegregation order.

Legislators are comfortable with the current system and more than a few have a vested interest in keeping it in place.

It is election year, but the business community should demand the introduction of legislation to implement the findings of the committee.

Also, legislative and gubernatorial candidates should be judged on their willingness to take on this important issue.

Finally, we would like to see candidates push for an overall study of the costs of running state government, with an eye toward reducing costs and improving

accountability.

Governors typically come up with some organizational changes early in their terms, or when a fiscal crunch hits. By the end of their terms, head counts have risen and structural problems, such as pay scales that are not competitive with the private sector for key positions, are not addressed.

We believe similar savings could be found.

Some might also dovetail into education spending. The complexities of education spending in the state surely create added costs.

In this case, the benefits could go to taxpayers, who are facing nearly a decade without any reduction in the state income tax rate.

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