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Vision Network of Districts and Schools Launched

Schools and districts to focus on improving student achievement, implementing Vision 2015 strategies

Four school districts and two charter schools will form the initial cohort of the Vision Network, a public-private initiative to implement recommendations of the Vision 2015 Plan to bring about a statewide system of world-class schools. A total of ten schools—eight from Appoquinimink, Capital, Indian River, and New Castle County Vocational Technical districts, along with Kuumba Academy and MOT charter schools—will receive funding and other supports, including intensive training for principals and other school and teacher leaders, to help the schools pursue best practice models of teaching, learning and school management.

Marvin N. Schoenhals, chair of Vision 2015, and Robert W. Rescigno, Vision Network Liaison, announced this initial group. "During the development of the Vision 2015 plan, we engaged thousands of citizens across our state and experts around the world to share their ideas for providing a world-class education to every Delaware student," said Schoenhals. "Now we turn to our education practitioners to demonstrate how these ideas work to benefit student achievement. We expect this process will yield practices and partnerships we can build on to make Delaware the First State—in education."

"Partners from the public and private sectors have committed to providing funding and other resources to support the network in its efforts to focus on student achievement," added Rescigno. Vision Network Coalition Partners include the Delaware Department of Education, Delaware State Education Association, Delaware Public Policy Institute, Delaware Business Roundtable and Rodel Foundation of Delaware. The Wallace Foundation, University of Delaware and Delaware Business Roundtable already have announced contributions of funding and support to the Vision Network totaling over \$500,000. Additional commitments to the Vision Network are expected soon.

Network Partners will work collaboratively with the initial cohort of districts and schools to provide support based on identified needs, including intensive professional development; opportunities for collaboration with other Network schools and districts; opportunities to visit best practice schools within and outside of Delaware; regulatory flexibility; and assistance in securing private and public sector grants to implement strategies related to Vision 2015 recommendations.

Beginning in October, leadership teams from the districts and charter schools will receive intensive training provided by the University of Delaware's Academy for School Leadership and Focus on Results, a consulting firm that has successfully worked with public school exemplars including the Edmonton, Alberta, Canada and Boston, Mass. public school districts. Training will be research-based and will provide coaching for educators as they rigorously employ student achievement data to drive instructional decisions and provide supports based on students' individual needs.

"The Vision Network provides us the opportunity to continue our path toward excellence for all of our students. The Department of Education stands ready to work with the Vision Network districts and charter schools to accomplish their goals. This is an exciting time for public education," noted Delaware Secretary of Education Valerie A. Woodruff.

Membership in the Vision Network is voluntary. Interested districts and schools attended introductory meetings this summer and followed up by exploring the opportunity within their communities. The first group of Network participants was formed based on a variety of factors, including geographic and demographic distribution; their belief in the need for change; expectation that every student can be successful; alignment with Vision 2015 recommendations; and the capability, stability, and collaborative skills of its leadership. The goal is for all Delaware districts and schools to adopt practices demonstrated by the Vision Network. Cohort II is planned for 2008, with the exact timing to be determined.

"We take our responsibility to see students succeed seriously. Using research and data as our guide, we plan to increase course rigor and consistently implement instructional strategies," said Susan Bunting, Superintendent, Indian River School District. "The Vision Network will help us transform our two high schools into environments renowned for increased student learning for all students."

Indian River schools participating in the first cohort include Sussex Central and Indian River high schools. Schools from the other districts include: Howard and St. George's technical high schools in New Castle County Vo-Tech, William Henry and Central middle schools in Capital, and Brick Mill and Silver Lake elementary schools in Appoquinimink.

"We are excited to work with Vision Network partners to accelerate our progress toward academic excellence, through building our collaborative instructional leadership team and improving our use of data to guide instructional decisions," observed Linda J. Jennings, Head of School, MOT Charter School.

The nine-member Vision 2015 Implementation Team, which oversees the Vision Network, is a subset of the 28-member Steering Committee that drafted the Vision 2015 Plan. The nine members include: Chair Marvin N. Schoenhals, Chairman, WSFS Bank; H. Raye Jones Avery, director of the Christina Cultural Arts Center; Dr. Kevin Carson, Past President, Delaware Chief State School Officers Association; Cynthia DiPinto, WolfBlock Public Strategies; Dr. Paul A. Herdman, President and CEO, Rodel Foundation of Delaware; Dr. Daniel Rich, Provost, University of Delaware; John H. Taylor, Jr., Executive Director, Delaware Public Policy Institute, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce; Howard Weinberg, Executive Director, Delaware State Education Association; and the Honorable Valerie A. Woodruff, Delaware Secretary of Education. Robert W. Rescigno, former MBNA Scholarship Director and Vision 2015 Steering Committee member, is serving as liaison between the Implementation Team and Vision Network partners.

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