

**SYNCHRONIZING  
THE ACCOUNTABILITY CLOCKS:**

**A POLICY STUDY OF DELAWARE'S  
STUDENT ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*A parent calls out from the crowd, "if you're rushing it, you're not going to be doing it right." Governor Carper responds, "There are folks who believe we're going too slow."*

Accountability Public Forum  
October 19, 1999  
Dover, DE

Contentious views about how much time education reform takes is reflective of much more than fear or impatience. This policy study of Delaware's student accountability initiative uncovers conflicting ideologies of those effecting, and those affected by, the state's education reform efforts. These varied understandings of what systemic change involves, and consequently how long it should take, are weighty issues. They have driven, directly or indirectly, much of the state's past, as well as its current policymaking: its laws, its regulations, and its local policies. This study explores these differing views and some of the policies and programs that have subsequently evolved. Most importantly, the study examines the path Delaware has taken over the past ten years as influenced by various interpretations of time and where the state is in its progress toward systemic education reform.

The research of Delaware's student accountability plan began as an exploration of a single question, that is, what do Delaware policy makers see as the intended benefits of the state's student accountability plan? The study had two purposes:

- 1) to provide insight to the context of the state's accountability initiative, and;
- 2) to provide a framework for analysis of longitudinal and case studies that focus on the impact of the student accountability plan.

However, as the study proceeded over the 1999-2000 academic year, its scope inevitably broadened. Data collection strategies included structured interviews with Delaware policy makers, analysis of accountability-related documents, attendance at public meetings where student and educator accountability proposals were scrutinized and informal interviews with numerous policy makers across the state. These activities yielded a wealth of information and insights that extended far beyond the parameters of the original research question.

This report addresses the central question about policymakers' views. It synthesizes the most common and explicit goals of the student accountability plan. To provide a broader context, it explores the state of the nation in regards to accountability, from both historical and comparative perspectives. Furthermore, it examines the Delaware's student accountability initiative from the viewpoints of many of those who created it. The analysis speaks to the existence of diverse understandings of what changes are needed as well as how systems and people change.

## DELAWARE POLICY MAKERS' EXPLICIT GOALS FOR THE STUDENT ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN

- ✓ *Improve student achievement by:*
  - 1) Providing a system for measuring student performance against the state content standards;
  - 2) Setting high expectations;
  - 3) Establishing clear criteria of performance;
  - 4) Committing to continuous improvement; and,
  - 5) Maximizing student potential.
  
- ✓ *Ensure that all children can achieve by:*
  - 1) Raising expectations of those involved in educating children. While some spoke of “higher” expectations, others believed expectations should be “realistic” and “reasonable;”
  - 2) Decreasing the achievement gap between white and minority students and between students who come from economically-advantaged and disadvantaged families;
  - 3) Establishing an educational system that expects more and provides more; and,
  - 4) Fostering a fully-inclusive and fair educational system for all students.
  
- ✓ *Better prepare the workforce by:*
  - 1) Motivating educators toward continuous improvement as professionals and responsive service to their communities;
  - 2) Providing a supply of employees with higher-order thinking skills that will enable them to be successful in the global marketplace; and,
  - 3) Improving the state’s economy by enabling the state to recruit more businesses to locate in Delaware.
  
- ✓ *Focus the educational system on student outcomes by:*
  - 1) Motivating (through a system of external rewards and sanctions) changes in educators’ behavior and attitudes; and,
  - 2) Focusing resources and activities on factors that positively affect student achievement.

## UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

The above-stated *explicit* goals suggest *implicit* assumptions about how change occurs and how desired improvements come about. Some of these assumptions include that:

- ❑ Higher expectations and focusing on outcomes will result in better performance of educators and subsequently, students;
- ❑ Individuals will respond in a fair manner when faced with information about inequities;
- ❑ Education is responsible for the preparation of the workforce and that a well-prepared workforce will improve the state's economy; and,
- ❑ Change in educators' and students' behavior and attitudes can best be fostered through the use of external reinforcement, i.e., rewards and sanctions.

## SYSTEMIC EDUCATION CHANGE AND DELAWARE'S REFORM

Education is one of, if not the most important topic on today's political agenda. Current education reform initiatives differ from what has been typically attempted in the past; they are also much more complex. Education reform in the 1970s and 80s sought to improve educational inputs and thus, ensure student competency in basic skills. However, research found that activities such as lengthening the school day, increasing graduation requirements, and lock-step curriculum did little to change what happened in the classroom. The contemporary initiative calls for fundamental restructuring of the entire process of schooling. This push for systemic reform is in response to the changing nature of our social and economic structure. A reconfigured educational system must ensure that all students are taught to high standards, know how to apply what they learn, and are prepared to become life-long learners and productive members of society. Those involved education reform today acknowledge that what happens at the state and local levels has the greatest chance of affecting teaching and learning. What we have learned from other states and countries that are committed to improving their educational systems is that it is extremely important to:

- ❑ *Stay focused on the continuous improvement of teaching and learning*
- ❑ *Recognize the need for changing the entire system*

*Reforms, we have learned over and over again, are rendered effective or ineffective by the knowledge, skills, and commitment of those working in the schools. Without know-how and buy-in, innovations do not succeed. Neither can they succeed without appropriate supports, including time, materials, and opportunities to learn. Furthermore, studies discover again and again that teacher expertise is one of the most important factors in determining student achievement ... What teachers know and can do is crucial to what students learn.*

-National Commission on Teaching and America's Future

The report provides an examination of the components that are necessary to bring about a systemic change in the educational system. A model of systemic reform has been created that is based on related research and policy analyses derived from a variety of sources. The model presents the components of systemic education reform and their relationship to one another. It also provides a means to examine Delaware's progress toward systemic change. The specific analysis was accomplished by charting some of the state's key initiatives (i.e., those in which significant resources have been invested) against the model. This representation allows for inspection the past path of reform in Delaware. Moreover, it addresses what may need to be done if the state is to keep the reform focused on teaching and learning and the system in equilibrium.

### THE ROLE OF TIME AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE

The quotation that at the beginning of this summary captures “a fundamental proposition: time is relative. The clock does not run at the same speed for everyone” (Noble & Smith, p.181). Based on this proposition, the authors advance the theory that three clocks are at work within the educational change arena. These are the political clock, the professionals' clock, and the teacher clock. This finding derives from earlier comparative case studies (initially written in 1997) of reform efforts in the states of Delaware and Arizona. The studies produced a chapter entitled “Time(s) for Educational Reform: The Experience of Two States” in *The Dimensions of Time and the Challenge of School Reform*, edited by Patricia Gándara and published by in 2000 by SUNY Press (see Appendix E for full reprint).

This policy study concludes with an examination of the last decade of Delaware education reform through this lens of relative time. It explores which clocks have been at work with different dimensions of the reform. Finally, it speaks to the implications of the dominance of some clocks over others and the tension these varied definitions of time put upon the system.

## **Accountability: A Historical and National Perspective**

The issue of accountability is not new but has been coming onto the educational scene for well over 40 years. The political fervor surrounding the launching of Sputnik in the late 1950s, the war on poverty initiated by President Johnson during the 1960s, sagging SAT scores and school finance litigations in the 1970s, the economic threat posed by Japan in the 1980s, and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in the 1990s have all contributed to the current focus on standards-based accountability.

Most of the educational reforms in the U.S. have been initiated by external forces in response to a perceived or real crisis. Therefore, it is impossible to fully comprehend the wide spread appeal and adoption of standards-based accountability without a brief overview of some of these events. The following summary is not intended to serve as an exhaustive timeline of reform but instead represents a sampling of national events and movements that have left an indelible mark on the educational landscape.

### *The 1950s*

During the late 1940s and early 1950s America's educational system saw unprecedented growth due to the G.I. Bill, population increases, and an expanding economy. The curriculum at this time was under the influence of the progressive philosophy that emphasized social adjustment over the prescribed classical curriculum that had previously been the dominant approach to schooling.<sup>1</sup> However, with the launching of Sputnik on October 4, 1957, questions began to arise about the quality of American schooling and the ability of its students to compete internationally. This concern over the quality of education and the nation's ability to compete with other nations would recur throughout the coming decades.

The reaction to Sputnik was swift. By 1958 the 85<sup>th</sup> congress and President Eisenhower enacted the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). Federal money was provided to improve instruction in the areas of mathematics, science, and foreign language. More important that the lasting impact of this legislation, or the lack thereof, were the arguments and debates surrounding the legislation that called into question the role of the federal government in education. At this point in time the federal government took special effort to avoid interfering with state and local programs.<sup>2</sup>

Another important event from this decade that actually occurred prior to the launching of Sputnik, was the landmark decision on desegregation in *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. This decision found that the previous policy of "separate but equal" established by *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) unconstitutional and called for the immediate desegregation of public schools. This ruling placed concerns for equity at the forefront of the national agenda and impacted education in the 1960s and 70s.<sup>3</sup>



### *The 1960s*

The increasing concern for equity in education was evidenced by two monumental pieces of federal legislation, the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) of 1965. While the Civil Rights Act authorized the national government to bring lawsuits to desegregate public schools, the ESEA was designed to support districts in providing educational programs for educationally disadvantaged students from low-income areas.<sup>4</sup>

The funds provided by ESEA were to be used for preschool and preventive services, remedial instruction, health care, parent education, and teacher training. The component of the law receiving the most attention and financial resources was Title I. Under Title I, local school districts were required to develop specific educational programs to meet the needs of their educationally disadvantaged students.<sup>5</sup> At this point in time districts were held accountable for their use of funds more so than for the educational outcomes resulting from the programs developed.<sup>6</sup>

### *The 1970s*

The concern for equity in education, which began in earnest in the 1960s, spilled over into the 1970s and was evidenced in school finance reforms and the minimum competency testing movement that marked this period. In landmark cases such as *Serrano vs. Priest* (1971) in California and *Robinson vs. Cahill* (1973) in New Jersey, the concern went beyond unequal spending to the inferior or inadequate education children in the lowest spending districts were receiving. The litigation served to focus attention on the relationship between educational spending and educational opportunities.<sup>7</sup>

It was during this same time period that minimum competency testing (MCT) began to emerge as a simple accountability notion of establishing a minimum level of achievement needed to earn a high school diploma. Some suggest that this call for accountability was prompted by the inflationary economy, restricted job opportunities, and high taxes that characterized the 1970s.<sup>8</sup> In addition, it is not surprising that establishing the minimum of what students should know occurred at the same time that the courts were requiring states to define and provide students with an “efficient and thorough” education.

A few issues related to MCT are worth noting because of its similarities with more recent accountability initiatives. First, parents and other community members led this movement. It was easily understood by the public and quickly adopted by many states. Many people within the system criticized the movement as politicized “reform from afar”. It was also criticized for the intensified focus on test scores and their use for determining graduation requirements.<sup>9</sup>

### *The 1980s*

Whereas the education reforms in the 1960s and 70s centered on equity issues, education reform in the 1980s became known as the excellence movement. Individuals inside and

outside of education began to fear that the minimum competencies set forth in the MCT movement were becoming the maximum that schools attempted to attain.<sup>10</sup>

As corroborating evidence for the detrimental effects of a “back to basics” approach emphasized by MCT, national tests began to uncover large gaps in student knowledge. Test scores reported by NAEP between 1971 and 1982 showed steady declines in vocabulary, reading, and mathematics.<sup>11</sup>

Then in 1983 a wake-up call was sounded that is echoed today. This was the year that the National Commission of Educational Excellence released the report, *A Nation at Risk*. This single report has been credited as being a primary catalyst for current education reforms in the United States.<sup>12</sup> In response to *A Nation at Risk*, many states intensified high school graduation requirements and college admission standards, required more statewide testing, extended the length of the school day and school year, set higher state standards for becoming and remaining a teacher, and expanded evaluation procedures and performance incentives for educators.<sup>13</sup>

The excellence movement differed from previous periods of reform because it was a state-initiated effort to improve the academic performance of average or below-average students instead of focusing on a select group of students. In fact, the entire workforce was deemed to be in need of “higher-order” skills to enhance economic productivity and make our nation more competitive internationally. Moreover, the role of the state in the reforms of the 1980s increased along with their share of the funding for education.<sup>14</sup>

The excellence movement was also notable for the increased role played by state governors, professional educators, and the business community.<sup>15</sup> The business community has always exerted an influence on education. Nearly as long as schools have been in operation the belief has persisted that there are more efficient means of managing and operating schools. The influence of business waned only during the period immediately following the Great Depression when faith in business leaders as a whole was at an all time low. But the influence of business re-emerged during the 1960s and 70s and has remained a driving force behind recent reforms.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the state governors also continued to exert an important influence on education reform well into the 1990s. The next decade began with an unprecedented educational summit in 1989 led by then President George Bush and included the 50 states’ governors. Seeds were being sown for developing a national agenda of educational goals.<sup>17</sup>

### *The 1990s*

What began as a call for “higher-order skills” and more sophisticated national education goals developed into the “standards-led” reform in the 1990s. A “new accountability” began to emerge that focused on student performance measured against clearly articulated content standards instead of school inputs and compliance to regulations. It also included higher stakes for performance in the form of rewards and sanctions that were to serve as incentives for improving performance.<sup>18</sup>

Nowhere was this shift in accountability more evident than in the reauthorization of ESEA in 1994. Prior to the reauthorization, local schools receiving Title I funds were accountable for their use of funds. With the reauthorization of ESEA in 1994, the federal government increased accountability provisions for schools receiving Title I funds. States were now required to hold districts and schools receiving Title I funds accountable for ensuring that all students met the state's content and performance standards. States were required to institute content and student performance standards by the 1997-98 school year and have in place state assessments aligned with those standards by 2000-01. In addition, Title I schools failing to demonstrate adequate progress on standards-based measures of student performance could be sanctioned.<sup>19</sup>

Examination of accountability nationwide shows that most all states had developed or were in the process of developing state content standards by 1997. This is not to say that Title I requirements resulted in the development of content standards. Indeed, Delaware began work on content standards in 1992, two years prior to the re-authorization of the ESEA. But the continued concern over low-performing schools and the strengthened accountability provisions in ESEA went a long way in propagating the new accountability movement.

### *Accountability Today*

Unlike the MCT movement of the 1970s, the current accountability movement has more broad-based support from educators and non-educators alike. The standards-based accountability system of today is built on the promise of an aligned system of standards, assessments, and consequences.

With the current accountability movement comes the belief that holding multiple stakeholders accountable according to a variety of indicators will create a cooperative effort toward improving education. In a report entitled *Designing and Implementing Standards-Based Accountability Systems*, the Education Commission of the States presents an overview of the possibilities of what a complete accountability system could include (see Appendix A). Much of the information in the attached document was drawn from *Accountability: Blueprint for Delaware*, October 1997.

While accountability systems could take a multi-faceted approach by coordinating its efforts among schools, districts, and the state, most systems across the country focus on the state-to-school relationship. Although there is a great deal of rhetoric about who should be held accountable, most systems focus on students and schools. No single accountability system to date holds all of the stakeholders accountable.

### **Accountability Across the Nation**

The persistent belief in the educational improvement afforded by accountability can be seen in its widespread adoption in states across the nation. Many states have adopted standards-based accountability systems that include standards, assessments, and consequences. In the sections that follow are brief overviews of each of these components that are meant to provide a "wide-angle" view of current practices. Most of the information that follows is drawn from Education Week's 1999 Quality Counts report entitled *Rewarding Results, Punishing*

*Failure* More recent information was also gathered from various state departments of education.

### *Standards*

Currently, 44 states have content standards in all core subjects. Iowa is the only state not currently in the process of developing content standards. Most states began the task of developing standards by focusing on the areas of reading and mathematics with social studies and science following. In keeping with the reauthorization of ESEA in 1994, many states had content standards in place by 1997.

Critics of standards-based accountability believe that many states' standards are too vague or low to truly improve education. Routine rankings of states' content standards often occur with varying results depending on who conducts the ranking and what criteria are used.

### *Assessments*

Most accountability systems are focused primarily on student test scores. Information concerning graduation rates, Advanced Placement enrollments, student behavior and school climate may also be collected but are usually not part of the state's accountability formula.

The overwhelming focus of most systems is student performance on multiple-choice statewide assessments though most tests now include some form of open-response item such as an essay. The call for what some refer to as more "authentic assessments" such as portfolios and performance assessments has largely gone unanswered because a high stakes system cannot support their use. States have attempted to expand their measurement of student performance by moving beyond norm-referenced comparisons (performance relative to others) to criterion-referenced comparisons (performance relative to a standard) and focusing on absolute and gain scores.

After many states adopted their standards in 1997, a revamping of assessments to align with standards began. To that end, many states have contracted with test publishers to develop slightly modified versions of assessments designed to better reflect the state's content standards. Most states began their statewide testing movement by focusing on the areas of reading and mathematics and most will include social studies and science for the first time this school year.

### *Consequences*

One of the overriding goals of any accountability system is measuring progress and improving performance. The new accountability ushered in during the 1990s added consequences in the forms of sanctions in rewards to systems in the hopes of motivating individuals, schools, and districts to reach their goals.

Despite variability in the systems from state to state, a few things with respect to consequences are consistent:

- ❑ Most states are relying heavily on test scores to determine rewards and sanctions;
- ❑ Most rewards and sanctions are focused on schools and their performance and not on individual educators; and,
- ❑ Few states are willing to impose severe penalties on under-performing schools or districts.

### **Consequences for Schools**

Consequences for schools range from simple reporting of under-performing status (19 states) to school reconstitution (10 states). In addition, many of the accountability systems across the country tie performance results into the school accreditation process.

Fourteen states currently provide monetary rewards for individual schools on the basis of their performance and more are expected to do so. Where incentive programs are in place for schools, most award funds to the schools for use as school improvement funds, though a few states are planning to institute staff bonuses.

### **Consequences for Students**

Many accountability systems are using proficiency on the statewide test as a requirement for high school graduation. By the year 2004, 26 states are expected to tie graduation to performance on statewide tests. In the face of public pressure and high failure rates, several states (UT, AR, KS, MI) have dropped the graduation requirement or at least put off its implementation in order to review and revise their standards and assessments.

Beyond high school graduation requirements, student test scores have also been tied to grade promotion and other desired outcomes for students. Delaware, California, Louisiana, Ohio, South Carolina, and Wisconsin all have laws that tie grade promotion to test scores. In addition, Oklahoma has “no pass-no drive” law in which students must pass one of several approved 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading tests to be eligible for a driver’s license.

Rewards for students come in the form of college scholarships (8 states) and monetary awards for earning an honors diploma (Indiana). In addition, many states have tiered-diploma systems that recognize the achievement level of students. Of the 25 states that have tiered diploma systems, 14 base them solely on tests, 2 on minimum grade point average, and one, solely on coursework with the remainder of the states using some combination of these indicators.

### **Consequences for Individual Educators**

Currently, Delaware is one of three states that link student performance to teacher evaluations. In Texas, one-eighth of a teacher’s annual evaluation is based on the school’s performance on state tests. Colorado law also requires student performance to be considered in teacher evaluations but it is left up to the local district to decide what that means and how the information will be used.

In addition to Delaware, Texas, and Colorado, Tennessee also reports student performance at the level of classroom teachers. However, only teachers and principals receive the teacher-level reports. This information is used to inform professional development decisions, not to serve as a basis for evaluating teachers.

Other states are also beginning to create provisions for educator accountability. For example, the Georgia legislature is currently attempting to pass an accountability bill that would include staff bonuses for good performance and sanctions such as transfer or firing of personnel for poor performance. The bill also stipulates that student's achievement gains be considered in teachers' annual evaluations, and educators with unsatisfactory evaluations would be kept from moving on to the next step of the salary scale.

### **The Future of Accountability**

Only time will tell if the current accountability movement has the staying power to effect meaningful improvements in student learning. Particularly crucial for the current movement will be the extent to which policies are implemented to increase that capacity of districts and schools to meet the demands of accountability and the assistance strategies available for under-performing schools and students.

This review delineates the roots and growth of the nation's standards-based accountability system. Along with many other states, Delaware is pursuing a similar path of educational improvement. During the past decade, education reform in Delaware has grown from the development of standards and assessments and now includes a plan for student accountability and educator accountability. This study is the first section of a three-part study designed to examine the student accountability plan. This policy study is designed specifically to reveal the goals that Delaware policymakers had in mind as they developed the plan. The second and third studies explore the plan's impact statewide and within schools.

## DELAWARE POLICY MAKERS' EXPLICIT GOALS FOR THE STUDENT ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN

The primary focus of this study was to examine the question “*What do Delaware policy makers see as the intended benefits of the state’s student accountability plan?*” The intent was to ascertain what those who were responsible for creating the plan saw as its primary purposes. To better understand those purposes, the research explored the policymakers’ assumptions and intentions. Another dimension included their perspectives of their role and their thoughts about the status of the reform. Derived from these interviews were four goals that the policymakers saw as most salient. They believed that the Delaware student accountability plan should\*:

- ✓ IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT
- ✓ ENSURE THAT ALL CHILDREN CAN ACHIEVE
- ✓ BETTER PREPARE THE WORKFORCE
- ✓ FOCUS THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM ON STUDENT OUTCOMES

The intended benefits or explicit goals of the plan mentioned above are presented and substantiated by exemplars derived from both documents and interviews. The exemplars\*\* are meant to illustrate the key points; they are only representative of the points that have been derived from the analysis. The findings are based on the analyses of state documents and interviews with policymakers involved in the development of the student accountability plan. A complete description of the research design, including data collections and analysis, is found in Appendix D of this report. The following section outlines the results of those analyses. In addition, where available, similar examples that were culled from earlier Delaware studies are provided to demonstrate that some of these goals have been supported over time in the state.

### FINDINGS

Delaware policymakers, through both their written and verbal expression indicated the state’s student accountability plan should accomplish four major goals.

#### GOAL: IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Most policymakers concurred that the student accountability plan should provide a system for measuring student performance against the state content standards.

*In the simplest terms, the focus for a standards-based accountability system is on measuring success against clearly defined standards using measures understood by all participants.*

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\* No order of importance is implied.

\*\* Exemplars from interviews are indicated by “ ” quotation marks, document exemplars in *italics*

“The focus of the accountability system is on student achievement relative to our rigorous standards...”

“The whole point of the system is for students to demonstrate that they can meet the content standards.”

Closer analysis of the policymakers’ views indicated that some valued absolute attainment that would be accomplished by setting high expectations and establishing clear criteria of performance.

“... business men or corporate persons. They have been saying that we need to raise the bar for student achievement in Delaware.”

“And the product on which we all agree is that we want students who graduate from the twelfth grade and in earning a diploma master the standards we’ve set.”

Others tended to define achievement as continuous improvement, maximizing student potential, and normative comparisons.

“...I think five years from now we’ll see the same kinds of improvements that we’re seeing now from the writing test that started several years ago.”

*Our goal is to take every child at the level that they come to our school system and help that child to achieve to his or her potential.*

*Today we consider measuring Delaware students’ progress against standards in other states and/or nations equally important to measuring their progress against Delaware’s performance standards.*

#### STATE’S RESPONSE<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

The state has responded to the above-mentioned goals in a variety of ways. The state content standards seem to remain a primary target (criterion) but the normative influence is also seen. For example, a portion of the state assessment was built to reflect the standards. In addition, some of the cut scores (set in August 1999) were established as benchmarks of student performance against the standards. Interestingly, the assessment itself and the benchmarking process included both the criterion and normative viewpoints expressed by policymakers above. The Delaware state test includes items that enable comparisons of students against the state standards as well as items that allow for comparisons of Delaware students to other

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<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Throughout this section the “State’s Response” to the goal is explored. In these descriptions are only examples of what the state has pursued; the descriptions should not be seen as complete portrayals of the total scope of state-level activity.



students across the nation. The setting of cut scores also reflected both criterion and normative activity. The top three levels were established by a process of having expert judges score student work and develop anchors, that is what characteristics equate to 3, 4, or 5 (meets the standard, exceeds the standard, and distinguished). This is representative of a criterion approach. However, the lower two score categories, 1 and 2 (below and well-below the standard), were set by a normative process. Judges did not examine this level of student work against the standards. Those students who fell below 3 were simply cut in half; the top 50% were assigned a 2 and the bottom 50% a 1.

Beyond the assessment, the state also established policies that encompass the varied perspectives of what defines achievement. The school-level accountability legislation provides direction in regards to rewards and sanctions based both on absolute performance and improvement over time. These policies reflect the policymakers' views that accountability should set high expectations and establish clear criteria of performance as well as foster continuous improvement.

#### GOAL: ENSURE THAT ALL CHILDREN CAN ACHIEVE

Throughout the decade of Delaware's standards-based reform, views have generally included both excellence and equity. The focus on student achievement is reflective of the excellence perspective; the following speaks to the equity viewpoint. Policymakers presented their ideas about an equitable accountability system. These ideas seemed to be best classified in four general domains: expectations, achievement gaps, access, and inclusion.

##### 1. Raising Expectations

Policymakers asserted that a purpose of the student accountability plan was to raise the expectations of those who are involved in educating Delaware's children. Again, as with their views about student achievement, they had contrasting perspectives about what raising expectations meant. Some spoke of the importance of having "higher" expectations of all students.

*Accountability should be based on student achievement, and all children should be expected to reach high levels of achievement.*

"..all kids could meet the standards, and be expected to meet the standards."

"We could do a whole lot better if we just kinda raise the expectations."

However, others did not see expectations from such an absolute and inclusive perspective. They believed expectations should be more relative.

*Our mission is to ensure, for the people of Delaware, that all students will be educated to their full potential...*

“We’re hoping to *raise the level* of student achievement for all kids.” (emphasis ours)

“I think for too long, we have found too many excuses why kids can’t learn. And they can. They can learn something. Not all kids can achieve the same thing...”

## 2. Decreasing the achievement gap

Policymakers believed that it was important to decrease the achievement gap that currently exists between groups of students, white and minority, economically-advantaged and disadvantaged, regular and special education. In addition, some thought an accountability system would make these differences more apparent and subsequently foster efforts by educators to act and remedy them.

*Over a period of time, the gap between higher and lower achieving students must be decreased.*

“The gap that divides –what we see is very significant. And there’s also issues of class...”

“I’m pushing for underachievers of all types here. To develop a system that truly supports each kid.”

“It’s very important that teachers and administrators understand how really, really serious this is, in terms of the achievement gap...if we really knew how serious it was, I think that it would be much easier to encourage each other to help this be successful.”

## 3. Expecting and providing more

Along with the ideal of higher expectations for all children (as exemplified above), many Delaware policymakers believed that more had to be provided to certain groups of students so that they would have a fair chance of succeeding within the accountability system. They believed that if the system was going to expect more of students and educators, more would have to be provided to them.

*This presumes that there is adequate support in terms of resources and opportunity to grow and develop the skills necessary to properly address the standards, diversity in instructional strategies, and a belief that all students can learn to high standards.*

*Different kids come to schools with different needs, different learning styles, different goals in life, and we need school systems that honor that diversity of needs, abilities and goals by providing a diversity of services, with the proviso that in the end, everybody will meet the core state standards.*

“I think there were some very positive assumptions that children could learn more if they were expected to learn more. “I think one of the flaws in that assumption is that children also need more time and more resources, in some cases, to achieve that goal.”

### 3. Creating a fully- inclusive and fair educational system for all students

Some policymakers spoke about the hope that the accountability plan would promote a fully-inclusive educational system that would be fair to all students. These issues were of particular importance to policymakers concerned about special needs students.

*We need to make sure there is a fair playing field...*

*The next step (is) putting in place an inclusive, thorough and equitable accountability system ...*

“Student with disabilities should not, in any way, shape, or form, be excluded from whatever process is constructed...For the constituency group of students who are receiving special ed service, that can bring them into the regular education fold. That it can make all educators recognize that they are as important a group of students as every other student who doesn't receive special education services. And that's a powerful goal.”

“There seems to be a real division among people as to whether or not you truly can have higher expectations for special education students. I believe you can. I believe that a lot of those students are not as well served as they could be.”

In March 1997, a study entitled “Curriculum Alignment: Delaware School Districts Responses to State Content Standards” conducted by the Delaware Education Research & Development Center addressed this goal in regards to districts' efforts to align their local curriculum. A finding that came from that study sheds light on the complexity of this issue. In that report we cited:

*Equity and the expectation that Delaware's standards apply to all—The phrase 'equity and excellence for all' has developed a bumper sticker connotation. Unfortunately in doing so it has been stripped of much of the power of its message. Simply put, there is ample evidence from many quarters that many do not believe that all children can learn to the high levels of performance implied in the standards. Moreover, many denigrate the proposition that 'all kids can learn' with examples of a very few youngsters with profound needs. It is imperative that a clear statement of what is meant by the assertion that all kids can learn to Delaware's high standards be articulated and widely disseminated. A second aspect of the*

*equity challenge is that even where there is a moral philosophic commitment to the prospect of all kids learning the substantive knowledge of how to promote that is often lacking... In sum, there is a need for a clearer message about what is meant by the assertion 'all kids can learn,' a need for experiences and avenues through which to challenge beliefs to the contrary, and support to help professionals know how to best help a diverse student population to learn to high standards.*

## STATE'S RESPONSE

Excellence and the state content standards have been the primary impetus of the Delaware reform. Equity, while a minor focus, has been addressed in some ways. One way was through the Delaware Alternate Portfolio Assessment (DAPA), developed in collaboration with the University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies. DAPA is designed for students enrolled in functional life skills curriculum who are unable to participate in the regular DSTP. The results are to be used to determine if schools are meeting their goals of improving the academic performance of all students.

In addition, the most recent accountability legislation provides an opportunity for students who score "below the standard", to work through an Individualized Improvement Plan (IIP) in lieu of summer school attendance. These plans will be written to directly address those learning issues that educators and parents believe hinder the student from reaching the standards. The feasibility and success of this intervention is yet to be determined.

Another response of the state to address this issue of ensuring that all students can achieve was proposed as an opportunity to learn intervention, frequently referred to as a "fairness adjustment." This was initially explored from a psychometric perspective but proved untenable. Consequently, the legislature moved back the date when the consequences take effect so that the majority of students will have had an opportunity to have received instruction in a standards-based system.

Perhaps a litmus test of state's commitment to expect more and provide more is the recent passage of legislation that will create neighborhood schools in New Castle County. Without careful consideration and planning, this legislation has the potential to create schools of concentrated poverty that are mostly segregated.

## GOAL: BETTER PREPARE THE WORKFORCE

Some Delaware policymakers saw direct linkages between schools and the workplace. They promoted the view that a primary responsibility of the public school system should be to prepare students for the workforce. Specifically, they asserted that this preparation should be based on a model of continuous improvement of the system, should prepare students to compete in the global marketplace, and should ultimately improve the state's economy. Each of these views is illustrated below.

## 1. Continuously improving the educational system

Some of the policymakers interviewed believed that the accountability system would motivate educators toward continuous improvement as professionals. In addition, they saw the accountability effort as providing leverage to ensure that educators would be more responsive to their communities.

*The accountability program should hold students, parents, teachers, administrators, community members, legislators, and the governor accountable for continuous improvement in public education. Hold schools, districts, governing boards, the Department of Education accountable for continuous improvement in public education.*

*We need a system of service providers that is responsive to the customers.*

## 2. Providing a better-prepared supply of employees

As the changing society and economy increases its demands, workers need to have a higher level of skills not only to compete but to survive. Some policymakers expressed that the accountability system with its emphasis on holding students and educators to higher standards would foster better instruction resulting in students' development of higher-order thinking skills. They believed that the ultimate outcome would be that Delaware students would be successful in the global marketplace.

*Our mission is to ensure to the people of Delaware that all students will be prepared to excel in the global market place.*

*Schools will be judged on how well they perform in the market. Building administrators and faculty will be judged on how well their school performs in the market.*

“The business community has been a driving force for the last ten years saying that the people who are coming to their door...too many people, certainly not everyone...Too many people from the Delaware public schools don't have the basic skills they need...”

“The student accountability initiative could have accomplished... a better, stronger education in the state of Delaware where our children could be able to get jobs and be successful in a workplace that has changed significantly with its needs.”

### 3. Improving Delaware's economy

Some proposed that an effective educational system supported by a strong accountability plan would better enable the state to recruit more businesses and/or qualified employees to locate in Delaware.

“Business, as the employer of school graduates, is an important part of the matrix that has a stake in the quality of education. We're not only employers of school graduates, but we have to recruit employees. And for those employees with families, quality education is an important part of their decision as to whether they would come and work for you.”

“Certainly our business community in Delaware has supported education reform for its own reasons. But for my viewpoint, for some very unselfish reasons as well.”

A study conducted by the R&D Center in June 1996 with Delaware policymakers entitled “Letters to the State Superintendent: A Study of Leadership Transition” addressed concerns some state policymakers had about the business view of education reform. In that report we indicated the following. The statement is a composite of the views of many.

*Education is not like business. The Saturn model isn't going to produce a new model of student. Education is an infinitely more complicated process than producing a car and allowing the decision making to be made on the floor of the plant. It's not the same.*

#### STATE'S RESPONSE

The state has sponsored various programs to address the needs of the workplace. They include but are not limited to continuous support of vocational-technical preparation through the county vocational-technical schools and of charter schools. In addition, curriculum initiatives such as School-to-Work Transition provides state-wide leadership for the administration of all vocational-technical, adult education, and school-to-work transition programs. The missions of the TQM Project for Transition Services is to provide examples of best and effective practices in transition planning for students preparing for adult roles into the community and the world of work. Another major initiative is the wiring of all schools throughout the state to enable access to technology.

#### GOAL: FOCUS THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM ON STUDENT OUTCOMES

Many policymakers believed that a strong accountability system was critical to focus a system that has been often been described as “loosely coupled”, that is, its parts while related cannot necessarily be addressed in a linear manner. Based on this, it would be false to assume that making a change in one element of the system will necessarily bring about change in all dimensions of the system. Also, policymakers asserted that efforts should be directed toward

factors that are known to improve student achievement. Moreover, they espoused a behaviorist perspective, that is, they believed that it would take a system of external rewards and sanctions to effect such focus. Of all goals addressed, this was the most prominent (i.e., most frequently mentioned) across all constituencies and documentation.

## 1. Focusing the system on student achievement

Most policymakers supported the need to focus resources and activities on factors that would positively affect student achievement.

*The mission of the Delaware accountability system is to focus the efforts of all participants in the Delaware public education system on student achievement as related to rigorous academic standards.*

*Delaware should pursue its standards-based reform agenda with a single-minded intensity that focuses every possible resource on those factors that affect success.*

“...in getting the state focused, and getting everyone focused on...excellence. And focusing on student achievement, rather than a focus on other things.”

## 2. Motivating changes in educators' behaviors and attitudes

Many supported a behaviorist view that the best way to motivate educators to change their attitudes and behaviors was through the use of an accountability system based on external rewards and sanctions.

*Despite longstanding cries for reform, there is great complacency in our public schools, and few educators see a need for fundamental change. For reform to succeed there needs to be a major change in the educators' attitudes, culture, and receptivity to new ideas.*

*It is hoped that the motivational power of both positive and negative consequences will combine to focus (the) education system on student achievement.*

*Accountability should be tied into an action system that makes best use of the best of what is known about human motivation, change, and viable rewards and sanctions to ensure planning and action that will improve the system and its performance.*

*...A school-based performance award is to improve teacher motivation, help them channel their energies to achieve this goal.*

“But not only do teachers need to focus on a set of activities, curriculum and instruction, to produce the student achievement results; they may also need to develop more skills

and knowledge to teach the curriculum better so as to be more successful.”

In May of 1995, the R&D Center conducted focus groups of teachers, administrators, and community members to explore the recommendations of the Education Improvement Commission. One set of proposals that came from that Commission was based on the concept of accountability. Some of the findings of that study, “Education Improvement Commission- Focus Group Summary” reflected issues that relate to the above-mentioned goal, and more specifically, about the use of rewards and sanctions to change educators’ behaviors and attitudes.

*While community members saw holding teachers and schools accountable for student performance as a more or less simple equation... some educators saw the terms incentives and sanctions as insulting and derogatory. Some criticized the system as being reflective of a business model and not sensitive to the culture of education. ‘I have an inherent fear of that, of that word accountability, because I think it has a business and production orientation...we’re dealing with human beings.’*

#### STATE’S RESPONSE

The state has clearly demonstrated its support of and belief in the external reinforcement model through the student and educator accountability legislation. Threats of retention and required summer schools are clearly designed as punishments of poor academic performance. In addition, the educator accountability legislation includes numerous rewards and consequences including salary increments for teachers who show evidence of improved skills and knowledge as well as potential loss of position for unsatisfactory work. Regular media publication of schools’ test scores is also acts as rewards or sanctions. However, the emphasis of this stick-and carrot approach is only come about in the last few years. As was clearly stated in one of the original accountability documents,

*Accountability can gain the attention of students, teachers, and school administrators; it can probe the extent of current success; but it cannot by itself improve performance. (emphasis ours)*

It is important to remember that the state’s initiatives in accountability are just one dimension and one means to prompt systemic change. Therefore, just as we introduced Delaware’s accountability plan in a historical and national perspective, we also believe that it is important to put student accountability in a larger context of systemic education reform. If a central goal of standards-based accountability is the improvement of the entire educational system and the subsequent improvement of teaching and learning, it is imperative that we examine the state’s progress from a systemic perspective.



## SYSTEMIC EDUCATION CHANGE AND DELAWARE'S REFORM

Questions to consider:

- Why do we need to look at education reform from a systemic rather than comparative perspective?
- How Delaware has been doing in regards to systemic reform over the last decade?

As was introduced earlier in the historical and national perspective section, the reforms that began in the 1970s and early 80s sought to improve educational inputs and ensure competency in basic skills. These efforts included initiatives like longer school days, increased graduation requirements, graduation tests, and lock-step curriculum. However, research showed that these did little to change the content of instruction or to alter notions of teaching and learning.

The most recent wave of education reform began in the mid- to late 80s and was triggered by President Reagan's *Nation at Risk* report. This model of education reform calls for a fundamental restructuring of the process of schooling- that is bringing about systemic change. The ideal would be a coherent reform that restructures the entire system, not just piecemeal tinkering. Subsequently when thinking about how Delaware is progressing in its reform efforts, it is important to not merely compare our state to how others are doing. At this point, many states have abandoned the idea of systemic reform due to expense, impatience, or political pressures. Instead they have chosen to focus on one dimension of the system over the others and have frequently had to retreat, regroup, and start again. For example, the state of Vermont had made significant strides in the development of portfolio assessment. The majority of its effort to improve education was in this domain. However, when the state was confronted with the call for accountability, the assessment was not deemed valid for those purposes. Consequently, Vermont is now in the process of building a standardized test and rewriting their standards. Another instance is California. It has had numerous starts and stops in the education reform effort. One plan was when the state passed landmark class-size reduction legislation. This was an extremely costly initiative that stumbled due an insufficient number of certified teachers and not enough classroom space. These are two examples of states that failed to establish and maintain a systemic focus. They provide insight into why it is important that Delaware be cautious as it compares itself to other states. In addition to the key shortcoming of expecting tinkering to effect a systems change, there are three major problems with a comparative approach:

- 1) It contradicts the notion and purpose of standards-based reform. Delaware's standards should not be based only on what others are doing but on its own goals of what it believes students should know and be able to do and as well as the needs of the state.
- 2) Comparative approaches fail to recognize the systemic nature of the change process, i.e., how all the components have to come together to foster true, sustainable growth.

- 3) This model is dependent on efforts of various groups that are frequently tainted by their own political and ideological agendas. For example, public reports are generated by various national groups such as Education Week Quality series, Public Agenda, Brookings Institute and Heritage Foundation. None of these agencies is truly objective. Each group uses different criteria to judge worth and consequently should not be seen as not fully reliable and objective sources.

Therefore, from what has been learned not only from other states but other countries that are committed to improving their educational systems, it appears that it is extremely important to:

- ✓ STAY FOCUSED ON THE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

*Reforms, we have learned over and over again, are rendered effective or ineffective by the knowledge, skills, and commitment of those working in the schools. Without know-how and buy-in, innovations do not succeed. Neither can they succeed without appropriate supports, including time, materials, and opportunities to learn. Furthermore, studies discover again and again that teacher expertise is one of the most important factors in determining student achievement ... What teachers know and can do is crucial to what students learn.<sup>20</sup>*

-National Commission on Teaching and America's Future

- ✓ RECOGNIZE THE NEED FOR CHANGING THE ENTIRE SYSTEM

*Systemic change is comprehensive. It recognizes that a fundamental change in one aspect of a system requires fundamental changes in other aspects in order for it to be successful. In education, it must pervade all levels of the system.<sup>21</sup>*

-Systemic Change in Education (Reigeluth, C. & Garfinkle, J.)

A model of systemic reform (see Appendix B) has been generated based on research and policy analyses from a variety of sources. After more than a decade of marginally-effective reform, diverse stakeholders have come to the same conclusion -- Demanding more from our schools is not enough; the system of education must be fundamentally changed. Systemic reform is proposed as an alternative to tinkering and add-on programs.

The push for systemic reform is in response to the changing nature of our social and economic structure. While raising student achievement is a central goal of systemic reform, it is also crucial for a reconfigured educational system to ensure that all students are taught how to apply what they learn in education and in life. Systemic reform is not so much a detailed prescription for improving schools as a philosophy of advocating, reflecting, rethinking, and restructuring. The 12 dimensions of educational restructuring are divided into three subsets:

1. **Central** Variables- learner outcomes, curriculum, instruction, and assessment have a powerful direct effect on student learning;

2. **Enabling** Variables- the learning environment, time, technology, and teacher leadership are closely related to instruction;
3. **Supporting** variables- school-community relations, collaborations, governance, and personnel structures are further removed from the classroom.

All of the variables should have learner outcomes as their primary focus. Implied throughout this model is the need for improving each dimension through capacity building or development and monitoring progress through accountability. The model presents the components of systemic education reform and their relationship to one another. It also provides a means to examine Delaware's progress toward systemic change. The specific analysis was accomplished by charting some of the state's key initiatives (i.e., those in which significant resources have been invested) against the model. This representation entitled "Highlights of a Decade of Education Reform in Delaware" (see Appendix C) allows for inspection of the past and current paths of reform in the state. This is not meant to be totally comprehensive but is intended to provide a general overview of where the emphases have been to date.

Moreover, it addresses what may need to be done if the state is to keep the reform focused on teaching and learning and the system in equilibrium. Kirst<sup>22</sup> emphasized that there is no single approach or recipe for restructuring schools but that the viability of systemic educational reform should be examined according to three criteria: gaps, conflicts, and depth. He states that

"the most acute disease is state 'projectitis,' that is, failure to mount a comprehensive or coherent strategy... The second major problem has been an inattention to curriculum, instruction, and pupil attainment."

#### STATE'S RESPONSE

The "Highlights of a Decade of Education Reform in Delaware" chart illustrates that many state-level activities have addressed the central variables: the development of standards, performance indicators, and the state testing program. Activities that specifically focused on instruction appear less coherent or systematic. In addition, the instruction (or professional development) activities are often supported by sources outside the state, such as the National Science Foundation and MBNA.

However, recent efforts seem to be focused on the enabling or supporting variables. The current trend of Delaware reform activities appears to be moving away from the central focus on student learning. It is not uncommon that many reform initiatives often emphasize the indirect variables (i.e., those not directly related to instruction). This usually happens because resources are more easily allocated and regulated in those areas. In addition, politicians gain more political capital when they forward new ideas than when they support an ongoing agenda. At times, the result is a system that loses its equilibrium. For example, Texas has created an overemphasis on student test performance. An unexpected consequence of this

imbalance is that in Houston schools, many students participate in state test preparation classes for six months of the school year. After the test administration, teachers use the remaining three months to explore all areas other than reading and math. While Texas reformers claim that more students are passing the state test than ever before, the state has the highest dropout rate in the nation and their national test scores show the gap between white and minority students continues to broaden. Texas' reform effort has become very narrow and extremely politicized.

While it remains important to attend to the degree to which reform activities relate to student learning, it is also helpful to be cognizant of policymakers' understanding of what the changes they propose entail.

#### THE ROLE OF TIME AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE

*A parent calls out from the crowd, "if you're rushing it, you're not going to be doing it right." Governor Carper responds, "There are folks who believe we're going too slow."*

Accountability Public Forum  
October 19, 1999  
Dover, DE

This interaction captures "a fundamental proposition: time is relative. The clock does not run at the same speed for everyone".<sup>24</sup> Based on this proposition, the authors advance the theory that three clocks are at work within the educational change arena. These are the political clock, the professionals' clock, and the teacher clock. This finding derives from earlier comparative case studies (initially written in 1997) of reform efforts in the states of Delaware and Arizona. The full publication can be found Appendix E.

Key issues were illuminated through this earlier study that now speak to Delaware's current situation in regards to education reform. Frequently the source of the initiative (whether it be legislation, regulation, local policy or professional development activity) and the policymakers' understanding of the complexity of the proposed change, set different clocks ticking.

"The clock that paces political reform runs fast, about the speed of the electoral process and political terms... The professionals' clock keeps its own time, usually varying by project and issue...the teacher clock runs at a slower pace because of the complexity in reaching the outcomes proposed by the initiatives..."

#### STATE'S RESPONSE

An examination of the last decade of Delaware education reform through this lens of relative time reveals that efforts have been driven by different clocks. In addition, it appears that different clocks set the pace for different components of the reform. During the early 90s, for the most part, it appeared that the professionals' clock set the pace. In particular, the

development of standards in the four core content areas took a period of two to three years. Then, the state began its development of the Delaware State (Student) Testing Program.

A simple perusal of the activities within the enabling and supporting variables indicates that another clock set the pace of the reform beginning in 1997. At that time, not only did the governance model of education change, the focus of the reform did as well. The political clock clearly provided the timing of the reform activities that predominated the period between 1997 and 2000. Few activities proposed during this time period focus on the central variable of the reform, improving student learning. Considering the different perceptions of time at work and the different views that policymakers have of what brings about change, Governor Carper's statement above is not at all surprising.

### POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The path of Delaware's education reform over the past decade has been both challenging and fruitful. Much has been accomplished and much has yet to be done. The state is at a critical point as it moves forward. The key components of standards-based reform appear to be in place: standards, assessments, and accountability. While these external drivers have been developed to move the system, the internal capacity to proceed in the right direction remains suspect. Capacity-building, at all levels, remains one of the greatest challenges.

This study has illustrated that Delaware policymakers have lofty goals for the state. In addition, it has pointed to some critical issues that could potentially derail the state from its plan to bring about systemic change. These include:

- ✓ The potential imbalance if the reform focus continues to be on activities peripheral to the improvement of teaching and learning;
- ✓ The increasing reliance on single initiatives (i.e., silver bullets) based on the assumption that the change is linear in nature;
- ✓ The disregard of the systemic nature of the change that is required. This implies the need to examine the reform "activities" in regards to gaps that may exist, conflicts that they may introduce into the system, and depth to foster sustainability.
- ✓ The ascendancy of the political clock driving the reform. As the reform agenda becomes more responsive to the political clock and less attuned to the complexity of the change expected at the classroom level, there is great potential for an increase in "unexpected consequences" or undesired responses at the school and district levels as they try to respond to what they see as unrealistic demands.

Having explored the goals of Delaware's policymakers of the student accountability plan, some of Delaware's major initiatives against a model of systemic change, and the implications of differing perceptions of time, the study concludes by posing policy questions for the Board's consideration:

□ FOCUS

Unlike Japan (a country that continuously scores high in international assessments), the United States education reformers try to change teaching through indirect means, rather than by focusing on improving the quality of classroom lessons. What role should the Board play to ensure that the focus remains on student learning?

□ CAPACITY

Problems arise when one assumes that when resources are provided that they are being utilized as expected. Teachers and administrators do not simply deploy resources, they calibrate them based on their own needs and abilities. What steps does the state need to take to build capacity among educators within the system so that the current system does not collapse upon itself or become so “altered” or “calibrated” that it bears no semblance to the original ideal?

□ EQUITY

Holding all students to high expectations is an admirable goal. However, the challenges of helping students reach those goals vary significantly. What is the state’s commitment to those students (and schools) that are further behind? Is there a willingness to entertain the idea of differential levels of support to level the playing field? If so, how should that be addressed?

□ SYSTEMIC CHANGE

The current trend in policymaking in the state appears to be driven by the political clock. As a result, reform activities since 1997 have predominantly been focused on factors that many consider distant from the true goal, improving teaching and learning. Should this pattern continue, the system may easily become overburdened. What needs to be done to establish equilibrium within the Delaware education reform agenda? How can the Board serve to educate the various policymaking groups of the complexity of the changes that are being proposed? How can the state avert the possibility of being sidetracked away from systemic reform considering the power of the various political agendas at work?

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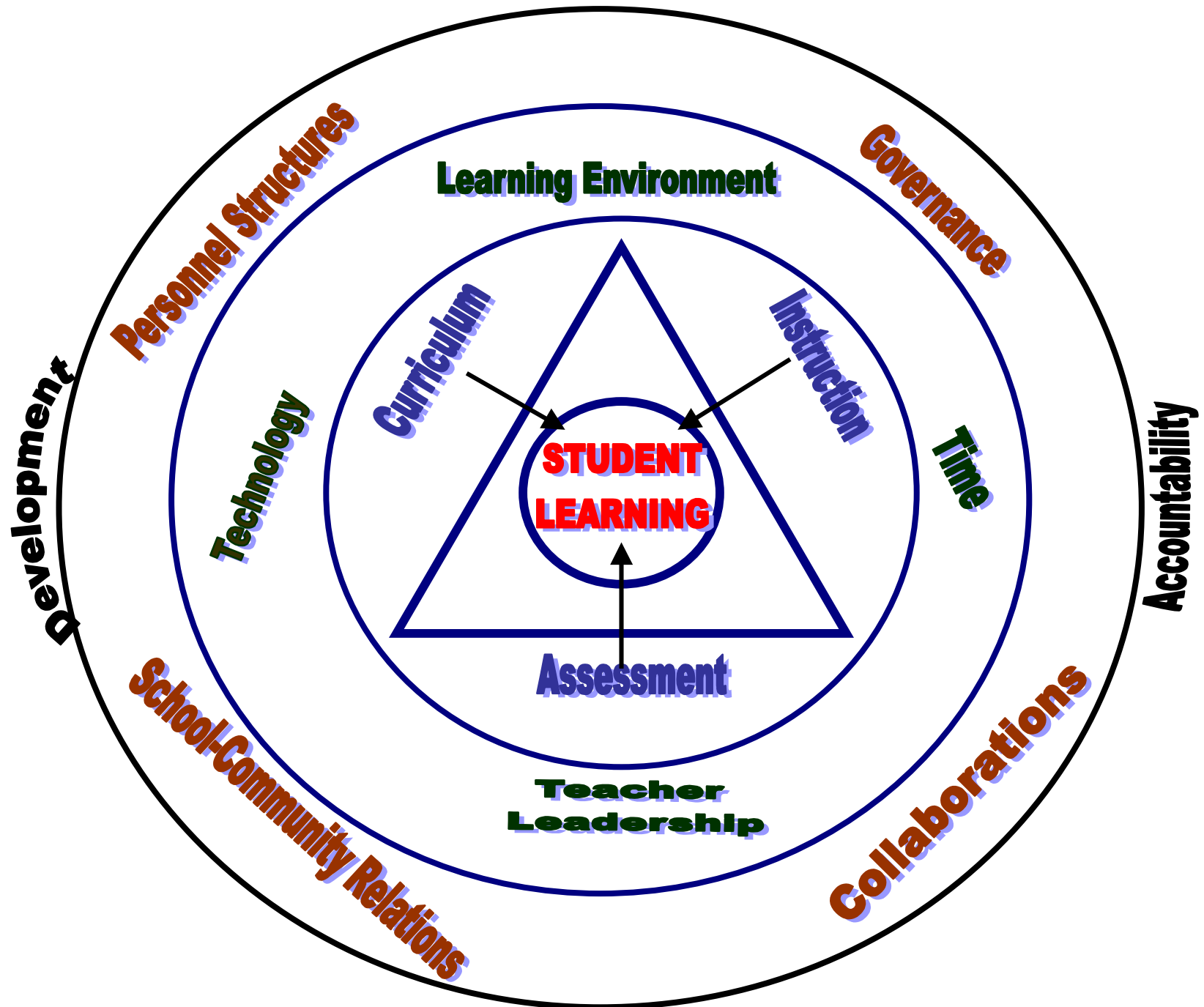


**APPENDIX A:**

**DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING STANDARDS-BASED  
ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS**

## **Appendix A**

# Systemic Education Reform



# Highlights of a Decade of Education Reform in Delaware

	LEARNER OUTCOMES		CURRICULUM		INSTRUCTION		ASSESSMENT
	<b><i>Content Standards</i></b>		<b><i>Performance Indicators</i></b>		<b><i>Various Statewide Initiatives</i></b>		<b><i>Delaware Student Testing Program</i></b>
1992 to 1995	<input type="checkbox"/> English Language Arts  <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics  <input type="checkbox"/> Science  <input type="checkbox"/> Social Studies	1996 to 1999	<input type="checkbox"/> ELA Elementary <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics Elementary <input type="checkbox"/> Science Elementary <input type="checkbox"/> Social Studies Elementary  <input type="checkbox"/> 6-8 ELA <input type="checkbox"/> 6-8 Mathematics <input type="checkbox"/> 6-8 Science <input type="checkbox"/> 6-8 Social Studies  <input type="checkbox"/> 9-12 ELA <input type="checkbox"/> 9-12 Mathematics <input type="checkbox"/> 9-12 Science <input type="checkbox"/> 9-12 Social Studies	1992	<input type="checkbox"/> NSF Systemic Change: Math & Science	1996 to 2000	<input type="checkbox"/> Reading & Writing <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics <input type="checkbox"/> Science <input type="checkbox"/> Social Studies
				1995	<input type="checkbox"/> New Teacher Mentoring Program	<b><i>Other Assessment Initiatives</i></b>	
				1996 to 2001	<input type="checkbox"/> NSF "Smithsonian Project" k-8 science	2000	<input type="checkbox"/> Delaware Performance Appraisal System II*
				1997	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional Teaching Standards <input type="checkbox"/> National Board Certification program	1998-2001	<input type="checkbox"/> NSF k-6 Science perf. assessment
1997	<input type="checkbox"/> Agriscience  <input type="checkbox"/> Foreign Languages  <input type="checkbox"/> Visual & Performing Arts			1998	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher- to-Teacher Cadre <input type="checkbox"/> Delaware Writing Project	2000	<input type="checkbox"/> DSTP reporting turnaround time*
				1999 to 2003	<input type="checkbox"/> NSF Mathematics 6-12		
1998	<input type="checkbox"/> Business, Finance, & Marketing Education	1999 to 2003	<input type="checkbox"/> NSF Mathematics 6-12	1999	<input type="checkbox"/> Delaware Professional Development Center		
		1996 to 2001	<input type="checkbox"/> NSF "Smithsonian Project" k-8 science		<input type="checkbox"/> Charter schools & special education*		
					<input type="checkbox"/> Numerous mentoring activities		

\* Indicates Delaware legislative activity (1997-2000)

	TECHNOLOGY		LEARNING ENVIRONMENT		TEACHER LEADERSHIP		TIME
1997	<input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Technology Program		<input type="checkbox"/> Alternative Schools <input type="checkbox"/> Drug Education Programs*		<input type="checkbox"/> Principals' Academy	1997 & 1998	<input type="checkbox"/> Time for Professional Development Conferences
1998	<input type="checkbox"/> All 7000 DE classrooms wired		<input type="checkbox"/> School Discipline Improvement Program*	1998	<input type="checkbox"/> Administrators' Standards		
1998	<input type="checkbox"/> DSTP data system		<input type="checkbox"/> Class size reduction*	1999	<input type="checkbox"/> DE Academy for School Leadership		
			<input type="checkbox"/> School construction * <input type="checkbox"/> Uniform Threat Management Plan * <input type="checkbox"/> Removal of disruptive students* <input type="checkbox"/> Statewide Alternative Schools *				

	GOVERNANCE		PERSONNEL STRUCTURES		SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS		COLLABORATIONS
1994	<input type="checkbox"/> Shared decision making*	2000	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher Certification & Licensure *		<input type="checkbox"/> School choice*		<input type="checkbox"/> Education Consortium
1997	<input type="checkbox"/> Secretary of Education – a Cabinet post*		<input type="checkbox"/> Alternative certification programs	2000	<input type="checkbox"/> Neighborhood schools *		<input type="checkbox"/> Education Improvement Commission
1999	<input type="checkbox"/> Declaration of Parental Responsibilities*	2000	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional Standards Board *	1999	<input type="checkbox"/> Property tax relief *		<input type="checkbox"/> Math & Science Foundation
		2000	<input type="checkbox"/> Educator Accountability *				<input type="checkbox"/> Business/Public Education Council
							<input type="checkbox"/> Superstars

\* Indicates Delaware legislative activity (1997-2000)

## APPENDIX D: METHODS

### RESEARCH INTENT

The National Research Council recommends that

*“High-stakes testing programs should routinely include a well-designed evaluation component. Policymakers should monitor both the intended and unintended consequences of high-stakes assessments on all students and on significant subgroups of students, including minorities, English-language learners, and students with disabilities” (p. 281).*

While there are numerous research questions that could be generated from the criteria proposed by the National Research Council, this research examines key components of the effects of high-stakes accountability upon students. The intent of each of the study components is to keep the Board abreast of specific effects of the legislation so as to inform its policymaking activity.

The initial phase of the research is primarily designed to monitor the impact of Delaware’s student accountability legislation. This does not imply that changes at the teacher, district, and state levels will not be of interest, but that the initial and primary focus will be upon the student and school level effects.

This study was designed to respond to the issues raised by the some of the criteria of appropriate test use posed by the National Research Council. It includes a three-part study. This report addresses the first question: *What do Delaware policymakers see as the intended benefits of the state’s student accountability plan?*

This policy study was designed to provide insight to the context of the state’s accountability initiative and provides a framework for analysis of the following two studies. In order to effectively conduct the consequential validity study (study #2), it is important to clarify and to delineate the intended benefits of the accountability plan as perceived by Delaware policy makers.

### DATA COLLECTION

Data collection and analysis activities included document analyses, community meeting observations, and interviews with Delawareans who had been pivotal in the development of the accountability plan. The generation of the student educational accountability legislation included the thinking of many constituencies including legislators, business leaders, community groups, education leaders and practitioners. It was important to explore the perspectives of each group that was involved in the development of the plan to generate an accurate portrayal of the intended benefits of the plan. In addition, data were collected at community meetings around the state when accountability was the topic of discussion. These included both state forums conducted by the Governor’s office and DOE as well as some sessions held within local school districts.

Interviewees included individuals in Delaware education, business, and community leadership positions that were members of one of the three groups involved directly in the

development of the Student Accountability Plan. They represented the following constituencies: (listed in alphabetical order)

- Business/Public Education Council
- Congress of Parents and Teachers
- Delaware Department of Education
- Delaware School Boards' Association
- Delaware School Administrators' Association
- Delaware State Board of Education
- Delaware State Education Association
- Governor Carper's office
- Governor's Council for Exceptional Children
- Local School Boards
- National Association of Colored People
- University of Delaware

### Interview Protocol

#### 1. Introduction

- Interviewer and project presentation (including sponsorship)
- Selection of interviewee
- Number of questions
- Tape-recording the interview
- The confidentiality of the study.

*Introduction:* I am (name) a researcher in the Delaware Education Research & Development Center. We are conducting a study on student accountability at the request of the Delaware State Board of Education. We are asking for you to participate since you were a member of the group that was involved in the creation the original accountability plan. The intent of this interview is to gain a better understanding of the state's accountability effort and your views of it. I have three or four main questions.

This interview will be recorded to accurately reflect your views on student accountability and to enable me later to better understand (analysis) your perspective. With your permission I will be tape recording this interview for later transcription and analysis.

I would like to emphasize the confidentiality of this study -- which includes all the interviews and informal conversations. No names of individuals or organizations will be used in any R&D reporting that results from these interviews.

Your statements will remain confidential and will be used only for the purposes of this study. If for any reason you do not feel comfortable responding to any question, you may decline to answer. Do you have any questions?

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## PROBING TOPICS KEYWORDS

- How would you describe your role in the student accountability initiative?

Can you elaborate on the topic of .....

Why do you think it was important that your organization was involved in this initiative?

What were you hoping to accomplish?

Assumptions  
Intentions  
Purposes

- Are you currently involved in the student accountability effort in Delaware?

[ If yes] in what way ...

[If no- go on to next question]

Participation

- What are your thoughts about where are *we* at this point in time?

- What do you think the current student accountability plan can accomplish?

- Do you think the current effort reflects the thinking of the original plan?  
-If yes or no, in what ways?

Conflict  
Compromise  
Assessment

- Is there anything else you'd like to share about the state's efforts in regards to student accountability?

I'd like to thank you for your time and thoughtful comments. We anticipate that this report will be complete in May and would be glad to provide you a copy.

### Document Analysis

Documents were selected for analysis that reflected not only the actual student accountability proposals but also earlier documents and some media releases that were generated regarding Delaware's education reform. They dated from 1994 to 2000. These included:

- *1994 Benchmark Goals Program*
- *Accountability Work Group Meeting Minutes*
- *Accountability Academic Bankruptcy*
- *Accountability State Policies*
- *Accountability Should Be Strengthened, Audience Says*



- ❑ *Education Accountability Decisions for Delaware*
- ❑ *Empowering Schools for Excellence: Final Report and Recommendations for DE*
- ❑ *Guidelines for the School Incentive Reward Program*
- ❑ *Instructional and Accountability Systems*
- ❑ *Mission Statement from Work Group*
- ❑ *Overview of Education Reform in DE*
- ❑ *Peer Assistance Review DSEA Policy Statements on Related Issues*
- ❑ *Proposal for Discussion DE Accountability Benchmark Comprehensive System*
- ❑ *Sec of Education's Vision for State Assessment and Accountability #1*
- ❑ *Sec of Education's Vision for State Assessment and Accountability #2*
- ❑ *Senate Bill 182*
- ❑ *Standards Based Accountability Works in Progress Version 5*
- ❑ *Teacher Motivation and School-Based Performance Awards*
- ❑ *The DE Administrator Standards*
- ❑ *The DE Professional Teaching Standards*
- ❑ *The Next Step – Accountability Iris Metts*
- ❑ *The Missing Link*
- ❑ *The Status of Professional Development and Accountability in DE's Public Education System*
- ❑ *Education Accountability Decisions for DE*

### Data Analysis

In qualitative research studies, trustworthiness (validity) of the findings is ensured through processes of triangulation. In this study, multiple data sources (interview, observation, and document data) and multiple interviewers were utilized. To ensure accuracy, data were recorded verbatim (interviews were transcribed in their entirety, public sessions were tape recorded, and documents were scanned electronically). Document data were initially coded by “benefits” and “consequences” and interview data were coded according to the keywords indicated in the interview protocol above. Similar, yet more grounded coding strategies were used with the observation data. Categories were then generated within each data source and then ordered matrices were developed to facilitate analyses across data sources. Ethnograph 5.0, a qualitative data analysis program, was used to organize data, memos, and subsequent analyses. Goal statements were then derived from these processes.

**APPENDIX E:**

**TIMES(S) FOR EDUCATION REFORM  
AUDREY J. NOBLE & MARY LEE SMITH**