

# LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY: EDUCATION

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## State Chamber Position

Without adequate education, today's students will be an ineffective work force for tomorrow's businesses. Delaware needs an educated work force that has the skills and knowledge to make our businesses superior. And we need first-class schools to attract and retain first-class companies and employees.

The measure of the success of our state's education system is the degree to which all students make continuous and sufficient progress toward meeting high standards for academic achievement. It is crucial that when Delaware's students graduate from high school they are adequately prepared for the next step – be it college or the work force.

Everyone responsible for educating our children – from the Governor on down to the teachers and students – must be judged by and held accountable for the outcomes of our children. Success in meeting these goals requires tracking progress with good data. It also demands organizations and leaders aligned with and driving toward the goal.

## Recent History

The Chamber's commitment to improving the education of our children is front and center in current policy debates at the federal and state levels. Two years after President Bush signed his far-reaching education reform law, states are taking steps to opt out of No Child Left Behind. Delaware, to date is not, but the General Assembly is considering revising the Delaware Student Testing Program.

On the positive side, Governor Ruth Ann Minner has restated her commitment to implementing a system of teacher accountability. The State Chamber fully supports teacher accountability and believes that it is a critical piece of the education reform puzzle.

Over a decade ago, the business community spearheaded the effort to set high standards for student achievement in Delaware's public schools. Progress was made, student accountability is now a reality and standards are in place to measure Delaware's schools.

## Solutions

It is now time for the next step. The immediate, specific

goals for the next wave of education reform as identified by the Delaware Business Roundtable and the State Chamber are:

- Students entering ninth grade ultimately graduate after completing a college and work force readiness curriculum and passing a test that externally validates mastery of the skills and knowledge needed for success.
- Children leave kindergarten demonstrably prepared for success in meeting established expectations through grades 1-5.

- Students, regardless of socioeconomic, racial or family background, meet the standards set and receive a rigorous curriculum at each grade level.

These are attainable goals. But first, we must develop and maintain a statewide data system that allows measuring student gain and progress over time. Better reporting of student performance will allow educators, parents and policymakers to see where we need to improve and by how much. Our standards must be more specific and align with and progress

logically throughout the academic sequence from K-12. These standards must set expectations in ways that students, teachers, and parents can act upon.

In addition, it is clear that no other force has as powerful an impact on a child's education as his or her classroom teacher. Districts need to make hiring, training and retaining effective teachers their leading strategy in raising student achievement. Assignment, pay and evaluation of educators must be aligned with the needs and outcomes of the students they serve.

Administrators at the school level must have the authority and capacity to drive change and meet objectives. These leaders must work to align personnel, resources and organization to adapt learning environments and school structures to the needs of the students.

Lastly, the business community must cement its role as an agent of change and stand ready to develop consensus among policy makers and educational leaders.

Now is the time to redouble efforts to ensure Delaware graduates are prepared for whatever direction they take upon leaving school. ■



Business must be engaged in public school reform to ensure that Delaware's children have the skills and tools they need to be competitive in our changing economy.