



Analytics

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RE: Delaware Public Education: A Proposal

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CRI believes that the first substantive step in approaching any public policy issue is gathering unbiased data. Data, while never perfect, moves away from rhetoric and anecdotes. Data tells us where we are so that we can measure future success or failure.

The Delaware Department of Public Education is to be congratulated and commended for the detailed measures of performance it now provides on every school district and every school, including charter schools.

Under the “Delaware Report Card” on the Department’s website any citizen can find data by district and school on percent proficiency in English language arts and math and on attendance (the percent of students who missed less than 10% of school days). And for high schools data is provided on graduation rates and the percent of 12th graders who are college and/or career ready.

This allows for accountability. Parents can make informed choices regarding where to enroll and administrators know where special focus is needed and can measure progress.

The Vision Coalition of Delaware, which has encouraged the establishment of such measures, has also set future targets of achievement. So, we now know where we are and where we want to go.

Where are we?

Due to such obvious factors as variation in the residential distribution of families by income and race, there is substantial variation of English and math proficiency by school district. Proficiency in English ranges from 66% of the students in the Cape Henlopen school district to 39% in the Woodbridge district. The average among all school districts is 52% proficient.

Proficiency in math ranges from 57% in Cape Henlopen to 25% in the Colonial district. The average among all school districts is 42%.

While the current levels of average proficiency are discouraging, they also provide reason for hope and progress.

There are spatial pockets of low proficiency that can be identified, including individual schools.

CRI proposes that a middle school in each County from the lowest performing school districts be selected to be turned over to the teachers and school administrators. The persons who best know the specific needs of



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the students will be in charge of school curriculum and spending. The progress of each middle school on English and math proficiency, together with attendance, will be tracked over three years.

Based upon the data, the candidates would be the Bayard Middle school (13% proficient in English and 4% proficient in math), the William Henry Middle School (38% and 23%), and the Woodbridge Middle School (35% and 24%).

The Department of Education would use its standard funding formula to determine the budgets of each school, but the schools' teachers and principal would decide how that money is to be spent (e.g., another reading specialist or another social worker). And the schools' teachers and principal would determine the curriculum, and not be bound to top-down curriculum coming out of Dover.

This would be an experiment in return to community schools where the persons delivering the service directly to the children have the main voice.

CRI encourages community schools to be tried.

Dr. John E. Stapleford, Director
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