

HIGHLIGHTS OF DELAWARE'S ESEA FLEXIBILITY REQUEST

COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Delaware adopted English language arts and math standards now in place in 45 other states and the District of Columbia, and has a high-quality implementation plan building on transition efforts being implemented under its approved Race to the Top plan. Delaware will work closely with institutions of higher education (IHE's) on transitioning to college- and career-ready standards. This includes the establishment of a workgroup to address teacher education preparation to ensure that teachers new to the field are prepared to teach to the new standards and assess student performance against the new standards. Delaware has established Early Learning and Development Standards, known as "Early Learning Foundations," that are aligned with college- and career-ready standards.

IMPROVED STATE AND DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ALL STUDENTS

Ambitious Performance Targets: Delaware will keep the adequate yearly progress (AYP) construct and set new annual targets to reduce by half the percentage of non-proficient students in six years.

Aggressive Plan for Turning Around the Lowest-Performing Schools: Delaware will identify the lowest-performing schools in the State as "Priority schools" and ensure that districts implement meaningful interventions in these schools. Building on the work already taking place in the State, Delaware will use the Partnership Zone model to support Priority schools. Priority schools will work with the State's School Turnaround Unit, which conducts walkthroughs of the schools, provides technical assistance involving research-based best practices, identifies potential supporting partners and monitors progress. Schools will select one of the four School Improvement Grant (SIG) intervention models.

Renewed Focus on Closing Achievement Gaps: Delaware will identify the schools in the State with the greatest challenges for groups of students as "Focus schools" and demand interventions to improve student performance. Districts would be required to select interventions that directly address the reason the schools were identified. Examples of interventions include expanded learning time to improve academic achievement and strategies to address social, emotional, and health needs to address disciplinary problems and high dropout rates. Schools not classified as Reward (highest-performing and highest-progress), Priority or Focus will receive a rating based on the performance of a combined subgroup of students, including students with disabilities, English Learners, Hispanic students, African American students, and economically disadvantaged students. Delaware will implement this approach so that the performance of all students contributes to a school's rating, despite the number of students in each individual subgroup being lower than 40. Delaware will reduce the minimum number of students necessary for individual subgroup performance to be considered (known as "n-size") from 40 to 30 beginning in 2012-13. This will increase significantly the number of student subgroups included in school and district AYP determinations, particularly for students with disabilities and English learners. Specifically, the number of schools considering the performance of students with disabilities increases from 59 to 84 in reading and 62 to 95 in math; the number of schools considering the performance of English Learners increases from 33 to 46 in reading and 34 to 48 in math.

Building Capacity for School Improvement: Delaware is creating a tiered system of support for districts, and will classify districts for support based on the performance of their schools. The State will create a needs analysis for each district and will consider individual subgroup performance in designing support strategies. Delaware will assign each district support levels based on the respective ratings of schools in the district. All districts will receive a basic level of assistance and the districts in need of the most intense support will receive assistance through one-on-one support and quarterly monitoring.

Transparently Reporting on Students' Progress: Delaware will maintain its rigorous schedule for reporting student performance on its statewide assessments. Information is publicly reported on the State's website and on the respective school and district profile page.

SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION AND LEADERSHIP

Delaware has developed and adopted the Delaware Performance Appraisal System II (DPAS II). State law requires that the DPAS II have five components, with one dedicated exclusively to student improvement. Without a "satisfactory" rating on the school improvement component, a teacher or specialist cannot be considered effective. Delaware will fund expert evaluators to provide in-house technical assistance and monitoring to each district. Teachers and principals will participate in conferences with evaluators, with the goal of developing a common understanding of strengths and areas in need of improvement. Information from the evaluation system will be used to improve instruction and drive professional development.