

Race to the Top: Delaware Executive Summary

Introduction

Over the past five years Delaware worked with a variety of stakeholders with a common mission in-mind: College & Career Readiness for all 130,000+ students, with each child free to choose his or her life's course. To accomplish this, Delaware organized its work around four major pillars:

1. College & Career Ready Standards & Assessments
2. World-Class Data Systems, Infrastructure, & Data Usage
3. Great Teachers & Leaders
4. Transforming the State's Lowest-Performing Schools

Within each of those areas, Delaware created "Delivery Plans" (over forty in-total) to develop, drive, and manage progress towards key outcomes in each pillar. Each Race to the Top (RTTT) project thus had a project plan ("Delivery Plan"), an owner, required deliverables, and measures of success—these were amended and adjusted throughout the course of the grant period. Each project corresponded with a sub-criterion of the grant, and Delaware collaborated with program leaders at the U.S. Department of Education (USED) to assess progress in each sub-criterion. Delaware ultimately requested a no-cost extension for the school year 2014-2015 to continue implementation of a select number of projects across each of the four pillars and 40+ delivery plans.

The 2013 administration of the Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL)-Delaware survey, a RTTT project launched in close collaboration with the Delaware State Education Association (DSEA) which asked every educator about their working conditions, highlighted how educators were feeling about RTTT progress between 2010 and 2013. It illuminated that, in Delaware:

Educators feel their schools are good places to work and learn.

- Eighty percent of respondents agreed that their schools are a "good place to work and learn."
- Seventy-seven percent indicated they plan to remain teaching at their respective schools.

Educators feel they have the appropriate resources in their schools.

- Seventy-three percent believe teachers have sufficient access to appropriate instructional materials.
- Seventy-five percent believe teachers have sufficient access to a broad range of professional support personnel.

Educators believe they are respected for their skill and expertise.

- Seventy-six percent said teachers are recognized as educational experts.
- Seventy-five percent agreed that they feel trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.

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Educators seem to value their professional learning communities (PLCs).

- Sixty percent felt that supports like instructional coaching & professional learning communities translate to improvements in instructional practices by teachers. (*Two consecutive statewide PLC surveys also supported this finding.*)

To create the conditions and enable Delaware's, the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) simultaneously utilized the RTTT opportunity to work towards the following aims, with each undergirding statewide efforts across the four pillars. Some of these objectives were clearly delineated in the state's RTTT grant application, while others emerged as essential supplemental efforts as the state's embarked upon deep implementation. These included:

1. Robust Communications & Stakeholder Engagement Efforts
2. Reshaping the State Education Agency into an innovative, performance-oriented culture
3. Rewarding top-performing schools
4. Establishing improved LEA Accountability and Performance Management Systems, thus integrating RTTT and Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) efforts

It is important to note that each of Delaware's existing Local Education Agencies (LEA) signed-on to the state's RTTT grant application; half of the total grant allocation (approximately \$60 million) was thus awarded to Delaware's LEAs. Each LEA embarked upon a local plan development process in school year 2010-2011, with plan templates structured around the four pillars (and nine subsequent objectives). While each LEA was expected to implement best practices from a menu of options and leverage statewide initiatives and ensure some degree of statewide alignment, most of Delaware's districts that received larger amounts of funding also seized the venture capital opportunity to make one-time investments that spurred innovation and set-up their local communities for longer-term success. Each of Delaware's districts could name 2-3 successful initiatives that were launched during the grant period they are now sustaining post-RTTT. Some examples include:

1. Caesar Rodney's 9th Grade Success Academy
2. Brandywine's Learning Focused Strategies lesson planning approach & Singapore Math curricula
3. Smyrna's SAT prep and creation of early childhood programming
4. Lake Forest's "Spartan Sprouts" early childhood program
5. Indian River's Project V.I.L.L.A.G.E and Parent Resource Center
6. New Castle County Vo-Tech's investments in online platforms such as APEX & iTracker
7. Red Clay's investment in "Academic Deans" for its highest-need schools

Most importantly, the student outcomes below illustrate that Delaware's focus on the "four pillars", strong implementation of statewide Delivery Plans, and local investments made by LEA leaders, when taken together, are paying huge dividends for many of Delaware's students:

- The percentage of young children enrolled in high-quality early learning centers has doubled.
- Ten thousand more students are proficient in English and mathematics today than just a few years ago, and more 9th graders are on track to graduate.
- The number of Advanced Placement (AP) tests taken and passed by high school students has risen by nearly one-third in the past five years, showing that more students are prepared for college and careers. Consider just one data point: The number of Delaware students taking AP biology jumped nearly 40 percent in the past two years, and the passage rate rose 50 percent.

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- More students than ever are graduating from high school, and the dropout rate in Delaware is at a 30-year low. The number of high school students who earned college credit through dual enrollment classes tripled between 2012 and 2014, and every college-ready student in the state applied to college in 2015.

Below are some of the highlights within each of the four pillars of Delaware's RTTT Plan between 2010 and 2015:

Pillar 1: College & Career Ready Standards & Assessments

Over the past five years Delaware remained steadfast in its commitment to college- and career-ready expectations for all students, launching initiatives across the Pre-kindergarten through postsecondary (P-20) continuum. Delaware accomplished the following statewide within Pillar 1:

- Ensuring that all educators have opportunities to receive training and collaborate with other educators on college and career-ready standards, including the state's launch of Common Ground for the Common Core in 2013 (over 100 schools have participated);
- Establishing a Delaware "Dream Team" of over 100 core content Teacher-Leaders statewide, with each working to develop Common Core lessons and units to implement and share;
- Co-leading one of the national assessment consortiums, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced), and officially transitioning to this college- and career ready English language arts (ELA) and mathematics assessment in spring 2015. Prior to spring 2015, Delaware implemented the DCAS for four years, which established Delaware as one of only a few states to administer a computer-adaptive fall-to-spring state assessment;
- Investing in school-day SAT implementation for all high school juniors, becoming one of the few states in the country to provide this opportunity free-of-charge to all students. This investment has now been sustained long-term through regular state budget sources;
- Driving the statewide "Getting To Zero" campaign, which positioned the Delaware Department of Education and districts/charters to ensure that every student that was college-ready and college-eligible applied to a college or university and ultimately enrolled; and
- Launching the Next Generation Science Standards initiative, with one Teacher-Leader from each school developing new curriculum materials that match the rigor of the new standards.

Pillar 2: World-Class Data Systems, Infrastructure, & Data Usage

Over the past five years Delaware built upon two decades of robust student data systems, leveraging multiple federal grant opportunities to further develop its statewide longitudinal data systems and to ensure that data was in the hands of the most important users, namely our educators and families. Building upon a strong foundation, Delaware created a culture of greater data availability, transparency, and usability—the cornerstone of the latter being statewide Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Under heading of Pillar 2 Delaware catalyzed its data-driven culture by:

- Proclaiming that every core content educator deserved 90-minutes of collaborative planning time each week (statewide PLCs), and then holding each LEA accountable for providing the space, time, and resources to enable meaningful conversations about student progress;

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- Supporting PLCs with 29 statewide Data Coaches that worked with every Delaware school over a two year period (2011-2012, 2012-2013), continuing that support in the last two years of the grant within one-sixth of Delaware schools that requested additional capacity;
- Developing the statewide longitudinal data system (EdInsight) by bringing together multiple, disparate data systems into a single sign-on, user-friendly, online platform that includes nationally norm-referenced student indicators (with warning signals as needed) around attendance, performance, participation, etc. Ensured that Delaware's key users had access to this new platform of student information, continuing to iterate versions based on user feedback;
- Building statewide Roster Verification Systems, Online Evaluation Platforms, and Statewide Recruitment Websites/Portals to support the state's Great Teachers & Leaders work;
- Partnering with four Delaware districts (the BRINC Consortium) to support their move to more personalized learning opportunities for our students;
- Joining the Harvard Strategic Data Project network, which led to the 2013 release of the state's College-Going Diagnostic and Educator Effectiveness Diagnostic; and
- Instituting the statewide TELL-Delaware survey, which asked every educator about their working conditions and made the data publically available on the TELL-DE website.

Pillar 3: Great Teachers and Leaders

Over the past five years the largest RTTT investments in Delaware have been made in supporting educator effectiveness. From pre-service preparation to recruitment to retention, many of the state's Delivery Plans focused on how to best support, manage, develop, and analyze the state's educator workforce. These strategic investments, direct implementation efforts, and LEA partnerships helped bolster Delaware's foundation of statewide evaluation system, job-embedded coaching approaches, and an open marketplace to new and innovative ideas in the realm of educator preparation (spurred by policy changes). A few of the most notable efforts within Pillar 3 are:

- Establishing the Teacher & Leader Effectiveness Unit (TLEU);
- Creating a community of over 600 educators to build assessments in almost every course/content area. Incorporating those multiple measures of student improvement into the state's Delaware Performance Appraisal System (DPAS-II) educator evaluation system, thereby strengthening the Student Improvement Component that had long been a part of Charlotte Danielson's framework in Delaware;
- Developing new educator evaluation systems for principals, assistant principals, and district leaders under the umbrella of DPAS-II and focusing deeply on the role of the "Principal Manager" and building Communities-of-Practices amongst various cohorts of administrators during the second half of the grant period;
- Providing job-embedded "Development Coaches" for over 100 school leaders to support their DPAS-II implementation (observation/feedback, goal-setting, process improvement) while also monitoring educator evaluation implementation statewide, conducting over 100 school and district site visits to review materials and interview educators during the grant period;
- Reshaping the regulatory environment to allow innovative approaches to School Leader Preparation, which has allowed for new programs leading to principal certification such as the state's first alternative route to principal preparation, the Delaware Leadership Project;

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- Investing in alternative routes to teacher certification including University of Delaware’s Alternative Routes to Certification (ARTC) program and Teach For America-Delaware, both of which grew during RTTT;
- Supporting teacher preparation through new legislation (Senate Bill 51) and teacher preparation grants to Wilmington University, University of Delaware, and Del-State University, leading to new clinical residency models and a deeper focus on new college and career ready standards;
- Ensuring that every principal participated in one of four major school leadership coaching initiatives, each with a separate emphasis that districts could access, from time-management to observation/feedback cycles to general management skills;
- Launching JoinDelawareSchools (www.joindelawareschools.org), a statewide recruitment portal and marketing campaign to attract candidates to the First State (statewide application).
- Launching the Delaware Talent Cooperative (www.detalentcoop.org), a targeted initiative focused on retaining and attracting top-performing educators in/to some of the state’s highest-need schools (93 percent retention rate amongst “Highly-Effective” ELA and mathematics teachers to-date); and
- Bridging the state’s RTTT implementation through the state’s Equity Plan process, with a first draft of Delaware’s “Excellent Educators for All” plan to be submitted to USED on June 1, 2015.

Pillar 4: Transforming the state’s lowest-performing schools

Delaware launched two major initiatives during the grant period under this umbrella, the Partnership Zone (2010-2011) and Priority Schools (2014-2015), while continuing to provide funding, technical assistance, and feedback to many of the state’s lowest-performing schools (both under RTTT and ESEA) through complimentary initiatives such as Focus Schools, School Improvement Grants (SIG), and LEA initiatives focused on their lowest-performing schools (Objective 8 within their locally-developed plans).

Delaware’s major efforts within Pillar 4 included:

- Delaware established the School Turnaround Unit within the Delaware Department of Education and launched the Partnership Zone (10 Schools) during the first half of the grant period. The ten schools included campuses from all three counties, including rural schools and charter schools. Several schools with the Red Clay Consolidated School District and schools such as Howard High School in Wilmington demonstrated notable student achievement gains, while others transitioned into the second iteration of this initiative.
- The State re-launched this effort under the banner “Priority Schools”, with six schools in Wilmington with persistently low-performance being selected. Delaware announced the six schools in fall 2014 and established new frameworks/MOUs under which the schools must operate that were revised based on lessons learned from the Partnership Zone. Governor Markell also formed the Wilmington Education Advisory Council (WEAC) during this time, which, in 2015, released the WEAC Report with recommendations on how Delaware should proceed in better serving Wilmington’s students through myriad efforts.

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Supplementary Efforts: Fortifying the work of the Four Pillars

As noted, the Delaware Department of Education utilized the RTTT opportunity in service of additional aims that remain critical supplemental efforts as the state embarks upon the next phase of implementation. These include robust communications/engagement efforts, reshaping the State Education Agency (SEA) into an innovative, performance-oriented culture, rewarding top schools, and establishing LEA/school accountability systems (RTTT/ESEA). While each of these continues post-RTTT, a foundation was established for each during the grant period. Notably:

- Creating RTTT performance routines that ultimately merged with the state's ESEA performance routines, thus allowing the Department of Education to have consistent touch-points with each of its 19 districts, including annual performance evaluations for each;
- Forming a Performance Management Office (PMO) that oversees annual grant allocations, ongoing data collection, and routinizing SEA/LEA feedback cycles while also providing various forms of technical assistance as LEAs wrestle with resource allocation decisions;
- Communicating with multiple audiences through multiple forums and platforms, including the state's GreatSchools Portal, the DelExcels website, and a stronger presence in social media and web-based marketing. Some of the best examples included web-platforms linked to major RTTT initiatives, such as "Delaware Goes to College" and "JoinDelawareSchools";
- Providing community and family engagement sub-grants to LEAs as they develop their local efforts around two-way parent communications, web-based information sharing, and ongoing efforts to further develop community awareness about their showcase programs; and
- Delivering "Academic Achievement Awards" to over a dozen schools during the grant period (in collaboration with former Lieutenant Governor Matt Denn), thus utilizing grant funding to highlight where outstanding school and student performance is happening around the state.

Sustaining the Spirit of RTTT: Opportunities for Statewide Reflection & Forging Ahead

Over the past five years, the rapid pace of change across a comprehensive educational improvement agenda has created many opportunities for statewide reflection. Parents, civic leaders, educators, philanthropists, and policy-makers alike have been compelled to wrestle with new data, new systems, and new priorities. Stakeholder engagement has been and continues to be a cornerstone of the "Delaware Way", with scores of committees, working groups and community conversations happening across the state each month. The fifth and final year of grant implementation has allowed state leaders to consider where greater stakeholder engagement, where greater action is needed, and how best to forge ahead with urgency on behalf of our students while also ensuring that our educators, parents and communities leaders are the most important members of the state's broad coalition in bringing about ongoing improvements. The spirit of RTTT that every student should graduate with the freedom to choose his or her life's path remains alive. Below are a few illustrative examples of how Delaware is grappling with "what's next":

- The Vision Coalition has reconvened over the past year (led by the Rodel Foundation), to chart a course for "ED25" based on lessons learned from Vision2015. A statewide plan will be released this year that outlines 5-10 "pillars" for statewide attention over the next decade.
- The Delaware Department of Education released college remediation data over the past year, which has brought together LEAs, IHEs, and other state leaders to develop new approaches and knowledge about how to address the large number of students not ready for college material upon high school graduation.

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- The Governor’s Recommended Budget for FY16 includes \$7.5 Million in annual funding to sustain the best of RTTT, including support for Common Core implementation, Educator Preparation Programs, Data Systems, and additional funding for low-performing schools. Delaware has made hard choices about which initiatives to shrink or stop as a result.
- The Committee for the Advancement of Educator Compensation & Careers (CAECC) has convened regularly over the past year, drawing upon RTTT experiences in Delaware and across the country as the state considers how to re-think the educator career continuum.
- The Delaware State Board of Education is utilizing its monthly meetings to highlight the four pillars of its strategic plan (which are similar but not identical to the state’s “four pillars”), thus re-engaging state leaders and community stakeholders on its efforts to improve literacy across the curriculum, educator preparation, teacher-leadership, early childhood programming, and next generation standards and assessments.
- The Delaware Professional Standards Board, under new leadership, is reviewing all regulations for alignment with Senate Bill 51 (Teacher Prep), continuing to review applications for new school preparation programs, and partnering with multiple stakeholders in the realm of key regulations around special education and professional learning.
- The WEAC, as noted herein, released a major report on the future of Wilmington schools. State policymakers and Wilmington community leaders are reviewing the report at-present and considering implications for district governance, the charter school marketplace, and statewide funding formulas. The report also calls for greater collaboration across schools.
- Delaware’s “Priority Schools” (6) in Wilmington will move into Year 1 of their local plan implementation in the 2015-2016 school year.
- Statewide commissions on the amount/role of student testing, the availability of statewide educational opportunities (i.e. types of schools and enrollment barriers) across all three counties, and the role of charter schools are being considered by the Governor’s Office, State Legislature, State Board of Education, and Delaware Department of Education.
- The Delaware Department of Education has incorporated lessons learned from performance management routines in re-establishing its approach to the annual consolidated grant application (which outlines how federal funding is distributed and assessed).
- The Delaware Department of Education has dramatically increased the amount of competitive funding opportunities it is making available to LEAs (e.g. annual comprehensive induction/mentoring grants, for which 17 LEAs applied this year), and will continue to orient in the direction of making state funds directly available to LEAs while also investing in statewide initiatives that create economies-of-scale of smaller districts.
- Delaware is collectively preparing for the release of new assessment results this summer, including how best to inform parents about how best to use their students’ results to understand how their students are progressing in various subject areas.
- The Delaware Department of Education is building upon its track record of success in building data systems and delivering high-quality research to key stakeholders by putting together applications for additional federal grant funds in both areas.
- The Accountability Framework Working Group (AFWG), which is comprised of stakeholders from across the state, has been meeting regularly in 2015 as Delaware’s works to establish a new framework for school and LEA accountability that considers multiple measures of student growth, achievement, and progress in various CCR areas.
- The purview of the DPAS-II Advisory Committee (co-chaired by members of DSEA/DASA) has been broadened by legislation in the last two years, with that group now playing a larger role in recommending how to improve educator evaluation systems and implementation.

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- The Delaware Department of Education is revamping its Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming, in collaboration with the state’s LEAs and in response to new data about the state’s labor market over the next several decades.
- The Teacher & Leader Effectiveness Unit is focusing more deeply on supporting School Leadership initiatives, as the role of School Leaders (at all levels) has been paramount in the implementation of RTTT and in the feedback DDOE is receiving in developing its Equity Plan. This is also part of the State Board’s “Educators as Catalysts” pillar.

As Delaware forges ahead, these examples of sustaining the spirit of RTTT build upon many decades of establishing a foundation for student success. In considering this small set of examples of how the Department and other educational organizations are charting a path forward, it becomes clear that Delaware’s ecosystem of committed partners and governmental leaders has become a broader tent that is even more engaged in public education in recent times, and that this engagement has broadened the statewide dialogue about “what’s best for kids.” While the Delaware Department of Education has played a central role in catalyzing initiatives under RTTT over the past five years, many of the partners named above will be equally if not more important in sustaining this work in the five years ahead. Thus, only with deeper partnership with local communities and sustained stakeholder engagement with students, parents, and families will the next five years of educational improvement in the First State maximize the work that has been done by our educators and system leaders in the past five years. The state looks forward to continuing its partnership with the United States Department of Education on this journey, and pledges to maintain its focus on ensuring that every student is college-and-career ready, building momentum on the unprecedented opportunity that RTTT provided.