

December 16, 2010



Shanghai Surprise

The [OECD](#) released the [results](#) of the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) - an exam administered to 15-year-olds in 65 countries. While American students' performance [in science increased to the international average](#), U.S. students still lag behind the majority of industrialized countries in mathematics and reading. Surprisingly, Chinese students living in Shanghai came out on top. These students, who took PISA for the first time, outperformed their typically high-scoring international counterparts in Singapore, Switzerland, and Finland.

U.S. Education [Secretary Duncan](#) said, "We can quibble, or we can face the brutal truth that we're being out-educated. We can't blame these results on one group of students. Rather, we must recognize that all students aren't performing at high levels and work to increase student achievement across the country – or face dire economic consequences." President Obama highlighted this urgency when [he stated](#), "Fifty years later, our generation's Sputnik moment is back."

What are these other countries doing – or what are we not doing - to get these results? The answers are similar to our current [Race to the Top](#) efforts. Many of the highest-performing countries recognize

"Stronger Schools" Conversations: Dec 21 and 22

Governor Jack Markell's series of "[Conversations about Stronger Schools](#)" will conclude this month. Delaware's Governor, Secretary of Education, and union and business leaders are hosting community discussions throughout the First State. These conversations with parents and community leaders explore the efforts underway to improve student performance, support teachers, and ensure that Delaware's students graduate college- and career-ready.

Upcoming locations include:

December 20 - Stokes Elementary School
(Kent County)

December 21 - Cape Henlopen High
School (Sussex County)

[Check out](#) Governor Markell on Philadelphia's Fox 29 news, speaking about Delaware's education agenda and the changes in The First State's educational landscape.

Vision Network Spotlight

Why are there "traffic signal" signs inside [William Henry Middle School](#) in Dover? At the entrance, you'll see a large green, yellow, and red board indicating how the school is doing academically.

When first joining the [Vision Network](#), William Henry students were having difficulty communicating what they had learned. As part of their Vision Network training, team members reviewed several years of student data and uncovered a disparity between students *learning* the material and students *using* the material. This resulted in the school-wide adoption of an instructional focus

that talented teachers are the key to success.

Many:

only allow high-performing students into teacher preparation programs;

- subsidize the education of those entering the profession (signaling national importance);
- carefully on-ramp educators into the profession;
- conduct rigorous evaluations and utilize the results to inform professional development; and
- provide additional compensation and responsibilities for their most effective educators.

Vision 2015 supports the development and support of high quality teachers. The [plan states](#), "We must develop and support great teachers in every classroom who are able to customize instruction to each and every child."

Delaware Leading the Way

Delaware's [School Improvement Grant](#) (SIG) policies have been cited as best practices from which other states can learn by [Mass Insight's School Turnaround Group](#) in a report released last week, [School Improvement Grants: Take Two](#). In the report, Mass Insight offers "lessons learned" to states that are making grants to persistently low-performing schools.

Delaware's best practices include:

- withholding funds from schools that do not put forth bold plans (which is especially difficult politically in this struggling economy). Delaware made only two awards, and withheld 69% of SIG funds awarded to Delaware;
- creating a [State Turnaround Office](#) to provide technical assistance to schools and districts; and
- offering site-visits to high-performing schools that are engaged in school turnaround efforts throughout the country.

Delaware also can learn from some the best practices of other states:

- Massachusetts is providing grants to districts that demonstrate commitment, yet lack capacity, in order to position them better for future SIG awards; and

centered on critical thinking and communication.

School leaders and teachers worked with Vision Network trainers to focus on creating an environment that encourages communication and development. They implemented a reading evaluation program that tests students three times a year to measure student understanding of material *via* critical thinking and reading exercises. This evaluation tool not only gives the teacher an understanding of students' reading levels, but also can be used by the students to track their individual growth.

The data produced from this evaluation system is displayed on the green, yellow, and red boards around the school. Scores are posted anonymously so students can privately learn their own scores and compare them to the scores of peers.

"The students have really begun to own the data," explains Principal Eric Niebrzydowski. "They understand it as a picture of their work, and they use it for motivation. You can even hear the students talk about their scores, and you can see those scores are improving. We have seen the number of students in the red decrease, and the other colors increase."

Charter Environment in Delaware

Delaware's charter school environment received a "C" and saw its ranking slip to 14th in [The Center for Education Reform's](#) recently released report, [Charter School Laws Across the States](#). Last year, Delaware ranked 13th with a "B" average.

In scoring Delaware, the state received zero points for facilities funding, three out of 15 possible points for multiple authorizers, and lost three points due to our state's implementation and accountability standards.

When well-designed and well-run, charter schools can offer Delaware students exceptional opportunities--similar to the high-performers showcased in recently released documentaries, [Waiting For SUPERMAN](#) and [The Lottery](#). To move our charters up to an "A" we must support innovation, provide resources, and ensure accountability.

- Colorado and Louisiana clearly articulate what is required of both the state and districts in terms of responsibilities and consequences for inadequate performance.

In Delaware, FY10 SIG funds (about \$700,000 each year for two years) will be shared with four [Partnership Zone](#) schools.

Partnership Zone Update

The Delaware Department of Education has asked schools in the Partnership Zone ([Glasgow High School](#), [Stubbs Elementary School](#), [Positive Outcomes Charter School](#), and [Howard High School of Technology](#)) to reconsider their recently submitted reform plans. "They need to focus, and they need to tie their decisions to their data," said Dan Cruce, the deputy secretary of education. "Their plans reflect a lot of ideas and a lot of information. And they are likely overly broad."

Schools are in the process of rewriting plans they submitted to the state in November following weeks of help from the Department of Education Turnaround Unit. There's an incentive for schools to get their plans right when submitted to the state at the end of the month: The state can demand changes that are not what the schools might have hoped for, including turning over the school to a charter program or replacing staff.

[Click here](#) to read more from *The News Journal*.

Vision-aries

"The hard truth is that other high-performing nations have passed us by during the last two decades...In a highly competitive knowledge economy, maintaining the educational status quo means America's students are effectively losing ground."

- U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan, responding to the results of the 2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Forward to a Friend

Teaching Ambassadors

Applications are now being accepted for the U.S. Department of Education's Teaching Ambassador Fellowship.

Teaching Ambassadors are outstanding teachers who have a record of leadership, strong communication skills, and policy insight.

Ambassadors work for one year for the U. S. Department of Education, either full-time in Washington, DC, or part-time in their home states.

The Teaching Ambassador Fellowship supports the Department's mission by enabling a cadre of teachers from across the country to contribute their classroom expertise to the national dialogue and, in turn, facilitate discussions with educators across the country.

More information about the program and application is available at www.ed.gov/programs/teacherfellowship.

Did You Know?

A sparsely publicized documentary entitled "[Race to Nowhere](#)" is stirring up a quite a buzz among parents across the country. The film looks at the downside of pushing kids to be overachievers both inside and outside of the classroom. The film portrays the pressures faced by children when schools pile on hours of homework and coaches turn sports into year-round obligations.

[Click here](#) to read more about the film from *The New York Times*.

Happy Holidays

As 2010 draws to a close, we wish you a joyous holiday season and much happiness in 2011.

Contact us!

For more information on how to become involved with Vision 2015, please visit our web site, <http://www.vision2015delaware.org>, or e-mail us at info@vision2015delaware.org.

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